A

SERMON,

PREACHED

At the opening of the Aſſembly 1766.

By JAMES OSWALD, D. D.

To which are annexed,

LETTERS on ſome points of importance contained in the Sermon.

Price Eighteen Pence.

A

SERMON,

PREACHED

At the opening of the GENERAL ASSEMBLY of the CHURCH of SCOTLAND,

May 22. 1766.

By JAMES OSWALD, D. D.

Miniſter of the Goſpel at METHVEN.

To which are annexed,

LETTERS on ſome points of importance contained in the Sermon.

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BRITISH MUSEUM

TO

HIS GRACE,

JOHN EARL OF GLASGOW,

HIS MAJESTY's HIGH COMMISSIONER

TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF

THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND,

THE FOLLOWING SERMON IS,

WITH THE GREATEST RESPECT,

INSCRIBED, BY

HIS GRACE's

MUCH OBLIGED, AND

MOST OBEDIENT

HUMBLE SERVANT,

JAMES OSWALD.

BRITISH MUSEUM

A

SERMON.

PSALM xvi. 6.

The lines are fallen unto me in pleaſant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage.

NOTWITHSTANDING the high pretenſions which all make to rational thinking, not many of us are poſſeſſed of juſt and rational conceptions of the divine government; a ſubject in which all are deeply intereſted. The unthinking multitude do indeed acknowledge the hand of God in every appearance that is uncommon and preternatural, but pay little regard to the manifold diſplays of wiſdom, power, and goodneſs, which appear uniformly and conſtantly in the regular courſe of things. The learned, on the other hand, have a pleaſure and a pride in tracing the amazing chain of cauſes and effects that is found in the ſyſtem of nature, but with no great at-

tention to the author and conductor of the whole. And it ſeems to be the privilege only of a few, of cultivated underſtandings and pious hearts, to eye God in all events, in thoſe that are brought about by known laws, as well as in thoſe that are produced by a train of miraculous diſpenſations; and they only are qualified to enter into the pious ſentiment of the Pſalmiſt in my text, becauſe they only will without heſitation acknowledge, that our civil and religious privileges are the gift of God.

The tranſport of joy expreſſed by the Pſalmiſt on contemplating the ineſtimable privileges by which he, as a member of the Jewiſh church and nation, was diſtinguiſhed from thoſe who haſten after other gods, bears a ſtriking reſemblance to the joy which ſprings up in the heart of a man on his coming all at once and unexpectedly to the poſſeſſion of an opulent fortune; or there is rather an alluſion to the joy which an Iſraelite muſt have felt on his being put in poſſeſſion of ſome rich and beautiful ſpot of the promiſed land by the ſpecial direction of God, and under his peculiar tuition: "The lines are fallen un-

" to me in pleaſant places; yea, I have a " goodly heritage."

Now, though there is a difference between the manner in which the people of Iſrael were put in poſſeſſion of thoſe privileges by which they were diſtinguiſhed, and the manner in which a kind Providence hath diſtinguiſhed us from the neighbouring nations; yet as the hand of God is diſcernible in one as well as the other, and as the civil and religious privileges you are poſſeſſed of, are not inferior to thoſe enjoyed by them; ſo you will allow, that your gratitude ought to be equal to theirs; and will not think it improper that I take this opportunity of calling upon you to make thoſe returns to Providence, which will be found to be due on the ſlighteſt attention.

Before I enter on our civil or religious privileges, it may not be amiſs to take notice of our natural ſituation, as it contributes not a little to our ſafety and proſperity, and muſt at firſt ſight be aſcribed, not to our own choice, but to the gracious appointment of God. Our reſidence then is fixed, not in thoſe ſouthern climes where nature pours out her gifts ſpontaneouſly to

an effeminate race, who have hardly ſpirit to enjoy them; but on a ſoil which demands and encourages our application to thoſe uſeful arts that have a tendency to raiſe the induſtrious to the higheſt pitch of proſperity and grandeur, and in an iſland which is admirably fitted to be the centre of commerce with neighbouring nations, and with the moſt diſtant parts of the earth. We have no occaſion to grudge others the poſſeſſion of thoſe wide extended empires, which often have been and always are in danger of becoming a theatre of blood and rapine, and where, in order to guard their frontiers, an armed force muſt be kept up not leſs formidable to themſelves than to their neighbours; but have reaſon to rejoice in the kind diſpoſal of Providence, which, by detaching us from the continent with the beſt barrier in the world, enables us to live with comfort and credit to ourſelves, and with advantage to neighbouring ſtates, arbitrating their differences, moderating their ambitious pretenſions, and preſerving to them their juſt rights with as much civil and religious liberty as they are qualified to enjoy.

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In this ſituation, then, we are ruled by laws made by ourſelves, under the protection of a conſtitution of government which hath majeſty and ſtrength ſufficient to check the licentious, without any power to hurt or diſturb the dutiful and induſtrious ſubject; and which, with unparallelled gentleneſs, puts in execution that equitable, mild, and ſteady adminiſtration, continually aimed at, but never reached, by the ſages and legiſlators of antiquity. But to ſet forth the excellency of the Britiſh conſtitution, exceeds my ability as much as it is beyond my ſphere. Let me rather put you in mind, that the delicate combination of powers in which its ſtrength and beauty conſiſt, is the gift of God; and that we in theſe nations are bound to acknowledge him for it, as much as any individual is bound to acknowledge him for any bleſſing he derives from his providence; as much, for inſtance, as one is bound to thank God for thoſe endowments of body or mind by which he is diſtinguiſhed. It is common, indeed, for weak mortals to glory in theſe accompliſhments, as if they themſelves had formed the faculties of their minds, or adjuſted

juſted the harmony of their features: and we, in like manner, may exult in the beauty and ſtrength of the Britiſh conſtitution, as if it had been the workmanſhip of our own hands; but a little recollection will ſuffice to prevent this impiety.

The Roman people, it is well known, ſtruggled long and hard for the privileges they acquired, without reaching a model of government that could give them ſtability and permanence. But we in Great Britain have the happineſs to be born under a conſtitution which hath ſecured the rights of its ſubjects for ages paſt, and may, through the bleſſing of God, give ſecurity to our lateſt poſterity. The much admired ſyſtems of ancient Greece were planned, you know, by perſons of profound underſtanding, and deeply ſkilled in politics: but who planned the Britiſh conſtitution? What Solon, what Minos, what Lycurgus, what ſtateſman or philoſopher, framed its fundamental laws, and fixed its poiſe? Or how can we account for this grand and beautiful phænomenon of modern times, otherwiſe than by aſcribing it to him who ſettled the harmony of the ſpheres, and

gave

gave to the ſea his decree, which it cannot paſs * ?

But if we have reaſon to thank God for our civil, we have no leſs reaſon to be thankful for our ſpiritual privileges. For, not to enter into invidious compariſons with other reformed churches, we find ourſelves poſſeſſed of that ſyſtem of eccleſiaſtical polity

* Inferior agents contributed their ſhare; but without their knowledge, and beyond their intention. The nobility of Scotland maintained their rights with zeal and intrepidity, even to the prejudice of the crown; but without the leaſt intention of emancipating the people. The barons of England, it muſt be confeſſed, procured privileges advantageous not only to themſelves, but to the body of the people: that it was, however, any part of their deſign to admit them to a participation of the rights they now enjoy, no man will ſay. When and how that branch of the legiſlature which is the bulwark of our liberties, came into being, is a ſubject of debate: but that the commons of England obtained a conſiderable ſhare of property, and by conſequence of power, through the policy of a prince who had no view to their intereſt, or to any intereſt but his own; and that they grew in power and property, through the wiſe adminiſtration of a queen, who, with all her good qualities, was no friend to the liberties of the people; and that the ever-memorable event which ſettled our claim of right, and fixed the poiſe of our government, was owing more to the providence of God than to the ſpirit of the nation, is known to all who are acquainted with our hiſtory.

The Britiſh people, no doubt, breathe a brave and noble ſpirit; and the brave and independent ſpirit of the nation is certainly, under God, our chief ſecurity: I ſay, under God;

lity which was ſettled in the church by the apoſtles of Chriſt, and under it have free acceſs to that variety of bleſſings which were the purchaſe of his blood; and, by an event in providence never enough to be celebrated, being relieved from Papal uſurpation, and from thoſe ſanguinary edicts under which our fathers groaned, we no longer receive as articles of faith the deciſions of

God; for, after all, the ſpirit of a people is a variable thing, as variable in truth as the tides of the ſea, which riſe and fall at different ſeaſons to a ſurpriſing degree. And any one who calls to mind the ſhameful ſurrender made of all our rights by the Scottiſh parliament, and the no leſs ſhameful vote paſſed at that period in the Engliſh houſe of Commons, will ſee clearly that our deliverance from Popery and ſlavery was owing, not to the ſpirit of the nation, but to the providence of God. In reality, if the monarch on the throne had not been infatuated to a degree that caſt a damp on his warmeſt friends; if foreign ſtates had not been alarmed at his connection with France; if Holland had not been in the laſt danger, and under a neceſſity of putting forth all its ſtrength; and if God had not provided a prince from that ſtate peculiarly fitted for working out the deliverance of this country and his own, it may be queſtioned, when and how the ſpirit of the nation would have exerted itſelf, or whether it would have exerted itſelf at all. So that, when we look back on paſt events, we are bound to regard the conſtitution of Great Britain with a ſacred reverence, as the work, not of man, but of God: for we are diſtinguiſhed from the nations around us, by privileges beyond what we projected or could have effected for ourſelves, beyond what were intended for us by others, and far beyond what we had merited from God.

fallible

fallible men, of men not the leſs fallible for their preſumptuous pretenſions to infallibility; but found our belief on the apoſtles and prophets, Jeſus Chriſt himſelf being the chief corner-ſtone; and, without reſtraint from ſlaviſh fear, or more ſlaviſh ſuperſtition, can look with freedom into the works of nature and the written word of God, and freely communicate our diſcoveries one to another, till we all come in the unity of the faith to the meaſure of the ſtature of a perfect man in Chriſt Jeſus. The worſhip of God is no longer practiſed in a language which the worſhippers do not underſtand, nor debaſed by ceremonies diſhonourable to religion, nor profaned by idolatrous repreſentations, or by the invocation of unauthoriſed mediators and interceſſors; but, to the praiſe of the glory of his grace, all are invited and encouraged to come to the one true God through the one only Mediator, and to worſhip him in ſpirit and in truth by the ſole direction of ſcripture and conſcience. And, oh! what manner of men ought we to be when we conſider, that whatſoever things are true, whatſoever things are honeſt, whatſoever things are juſt, whatſoever things are pure,

whatſoever things are lovely, whatſoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praiſe, we are now, through the indulgence of a kind Providence, left at full liberty to think of theſe things.

Ah! my friends, it is eaſier to expatiate on the advantages we enjoy, than to improve them as we ought: for, in truth, we have not yet imbibed, fully imbibed, the ſpirit of our religion. We are ſtill too much inſlaved to the authority of great names, and too much attached to the opinions of men, and to ſyſtems of doctrine merely human. We have alſo a multiplicity of ſects founded on frivolous opinions that are a diſgrace to the Chriſtian name. But this evil has abated in ſome degree; and may, through the bleſſing of God on the light we enjoy, be totally cured, or cured at leaſt as far as the innate folly and pride of the human heart admit of a cure. The ſpirit of diſputation ſlackens apace, and a more candid method of inquiry begins to take place; and if we do not underſtand wherein religion doth conſiſt, we know much better than they who came before us wherein it doth not. Perhaps

haps we are yet but laying the foundation of knowledge; perhaps we are but clearing off the rubbiſh of falſe learning to make way for the foundation. Be it ſo. Let us not however be diſcouraged, but go on thanking God for what we have attained, and truſting in him for farther attainments. The ſtop of inquiry too with which we have been alarmed of late, may be perhaps no other than a ſeaſonable pauſe, uſhering in a better and more profitable exerciſe of the rational powers. The ſame gracious God who, at the beginning, and throughout the progreſs of the reformation, raiſed up a numerous race of champions to combat the monſtrous errors which then infeſted the Chriſtian church, may yet raiſe up able miniſters of the New Teſtament of Jeſus Chriſt, to repreſs the licentious boldneſs and perverſe diſputings of men of corrupt minds, and to ſubdue the heart to God, not by the dint of metaphyſical reaſoning or critical ſkill, but by a clear, full, and affectionate diſplay of that ſyſtem of truth which the Apoſtle calls *the wiſdom of God*, and *the power of God to the ſalvation of men.* That profuſion of learning which has been la-

viſibly laid out in ſubduing invincible heretics, and the more invincible prejudices of pretended freethinkers, may, through a better direction, be employed in putting the great truths of religion in a juſt light, and in that order and harmony, in that beauty, majeſty, and ſtrength, which render them mighty through God to the pulling down ſtrong holds, and mightier by far than all the artillery of the ſchools. And who knows but the leaders of our different ſects, laying aſide their paſſions and their pride, may hereafter, with pure and incorrupted hearts, unite in promoting, extending, and perfecting the empire of the Lord Jeſus Chriſt over the hearts and conſciences of men? This would be a glorious finiſhing of our reformation. But for this we muſt look to God; and as we hope for farther attainments, let us return to our ſubject, and acknowledge him for what we have attained.

The enemies of the Reformation, you know, are willing to reſolve it into cauſes diſhonourable to religion: and there is juſt ſo much truth in what they ſay, as lays us under a ſtrict obligation to acknowledge the all-wiſe and all-powerful providence of God,

God, which brought about this deſireable event by a combination of cauſes of different and oppoſite tendency.

The darkneſs of that period was ſo thick as to be felt. The ignorance, the indolence, and the debauchery of the monks, and of many of the clergy, were offenſive to the good, while their pride and luxury were an eye-ſore to the great. The amorous diſpoſition of the Engliſh monarch perhaps gave occaſion to a breach with the ſee of Rome; and no body will doubt that the landed intereſt in Scotland and England were ſuſceptible of a paſſion for the tithes. But it will not be denied, that many of high rank, partly from piety toward God, and partly from zeal for the liberties of mankind, did concur in delivering the Chriſtian church from the grievous yoke under which it groaned. And it is worthy of notice, that thoſe princes who abetted the uſurpations of the ſee of Rome, were equally zealous in maintaining their own unjuſt incroachments on the rights of their ſubjects; which gave birth and ſtrength to ſuch a powerful combination againſt them, as afforded relief and protection to the friends of truth. And it muſt

not

not be forgot, that God raiſed up a race of brave ſpirits in Germany, in Switzerland, in France, in England, and alſo in Scotland; men who might have had their defects, as they were men; but who, for their piety and learning, their zeal and magnanimity, and unwearied labours in maintaining the truth, will be had in everlaſting remembrance by all who love the truth. And what deſerves particular notice, the art of printing was then found out, as if Providence had reſerved this diſcovery for facilitating their labours. To which let me add, that by the ſacking of Conſtantinople, and the friendly intercourſe of many pious and learned men, who, on that occaſion, took ſhelter among us, a new track of light opened upon the Chriſtian church. Thus a variety of cauſes, ſome natural, and ſome incidental, ſome of one tendency, and others of another, conſpired, under the direction of Providence, to produce this great event. You will ſay, that the Chriſtian world was ripe for a revolt, and that the powers of Europe were eaſily put into motion by any the ſlighteſt accident. True. But who produced this ripeneſs? and who conducted the different

tendencies

tendencies of theſe different powers to this deſirable iſſue? The ſame hand that forms the embryo in the womb; the ſame hand that rules the raging of the ſea, and ſtills the clamours of the people. So that we ought ever to be ſenſible, that we derive all our privileges, civil and religious, from the ſame gracious God, "who gives us rain "from heaven, and fruitful ſeaſons, and "fills our hearts with food and gladneſs."

* Moſt gladly would I now enter upon the many ſignal and ſeaſonable interpoſitions

* When the reformation was in its infancy, its ſucceſs and its very being depended, under God, on the life of a ſingle perſon, even that celebrated princeſs whom God raiſed to the Engliſh throne to ſupport its intereſts: for had her precious life been taken away by ſome caſual diſeaſe, or by the plots of her adverſaries, the progreſs of the reformation would probably have been ſtopped at home and abroad. But God preſerved her life, and lengthened out her reign amidſt a thouſand dangers, till his own work received a conſiderable eſtabliſhment. And here we muſt not forget the ſignal interpoſition of Providence in favour of that princeſs; and not in her favour only, but of this nation, and of the cauſe of religion and liberty, in baffling a moſt formidable invaſion from the moſt formidable power in Europe. Nor muſt we be unmindful of the deliverance wrought for this nation in the ſucceeding reign, from a helliſh contrivance, brought to light by ſuch caſual and unthought-of circumſtances as lays us under the ſtricteſt obligations to ſee and acknowledge the over-ruling hand of Providence.

tions of Providence for the preſervation and ſecurity of our civil and religious rights; but your time will not permit. Beſides, as you cannot be ignorant, ſo I truſt you will not

Providence. But our attention ought not to be confined to ſingular and ſtriking events; for we may obſerve the ſame kind Providence watching over our civil and religious rights in every period, and conveying them ſafe to us through a variety of dangers.

Upon the union of the crowns in a Proteſtant ſucceſſor of pacific diſpoſitions, the nation flattered themſelves with the proſpect of peace and tranquillity; but that dawn of happineſs was ſoon overclouded by the meaſures he purſued. He was a weak unſtable prince; and yet, weak as he was, he had the unhappy ſkill of ſowing thoſe ſeeds of miſchief which brought all into danger in the following reign. His ſon and ſucceſſor, a prince of ſpirit and capacity beyond him, reduced his principles to action. For, by the direction of a fooliſh and miſchievous high-prieſt, he introduced ſhameful fooleries in religion, ſupported by ſhocking barbarities; and, with the aſſiſtance of ambitious men of high rank, (an aſſiſtance never wanting to an ill-deſigning prince), he trampled on the civil rights of his ſubjects; and, to the aſtoniſhment of all who think highly of the Britiſh ſpirit, exerciſed without control a moſt deſpotic rule in church and ſtate for the ſpace of fourteen years, and would not be diverted from his favourite purpoſes by the repeated remonſtrances of his people and parliament. So the fate of theſe nations muſt be fixed by the deciſion of the ſword, that is, left to the deciſion of Providence; and Providence, let it never be forgot, let it always be remembered with joy and gratitude, gave the deciſion in our favour.

But to ſhow us how little dependence ought to be on human foreſight or ability, the beſt-concerted plan of our beſt and

not be forgetful of them; and that they ſtand recorded, not only in your memories, but on the tables of your hearts. I ſhall therefore proceed to the application of what you

and braveſt patriots was rendered abortive by the arts of hypocriſy. The arms we had ſo lately employed in our own defence were turned againſt ourſelves; and no ſooner were we conquerors than we were conquered. The beautiful fabric of our conſtitution was levelled with the ground, and fantaſtical forms of temporary government reared up in its ſtead. The flood-gates of deluſion were broke open; and enthuſiaſm, like a deluge, over-ran the nation, giving a ſhock to the minds of the intelligent, which they have hardly yet recovered. Amuſed with the oſtentation of power abroad, and the exact diſtribution of juſtice at home, we were governed by a military force, without ability to deliver ourſelves, and without the proſpect of deliverance from others. But God cut ſhort the uſurper in the middle of his courſe, and, to our joy and admiration, brought about the reſtoration of our royal family, our conſtitution, and our laws, without the ſhadow of reſiſtance. Shall I mention the returns we made to God? Theſe are too well known to need being mentioned. Never was a people more indebted to Providence, and never did a people make more unworthy and undutiful returns. In the tranſport of our joy, and intoxicated with our good fortune, we run from the extreme of religious ſtrictneſs into exceſs and intemperance of all kinds. Then it was that bare-faced Impiety firſt lifted up its head in Britain, calling in queſtion the great truths of religion, turning the ſacred inſtitution of marriage, and indeed every thing ſacred, into ridicule; then it was that men began to be aſhamed of piety, and to pride themſelves in wickedneſs; and then it was, in that flagitious reign, that people of rank and faſhion made an open revolt from religion, to

you have heard; and, firſt of all, would call upon you to give the praiſe which is due to God for thoſe invaluable privileges which, through the kind care of his providence,

which they have not yet fully returned. Thus we were ripe for puniſhment, and things were ripening faſt for our deſtruction. It is believed, that Charles the Second had an equal inclination with his predeceſſor to invade our liberties; but he had a mixture of indolence and good ſenſe in his compoſition which hindered things from coming to extremity in his reign. His brother and ſucceſſor ſoon ſhowed a diſpoſition to break through every reſtraint, and actually put all to the laſt hazard. And then, if a kind Providence had not done more for us than we did or were diſpoſed to do for ourſelves, we had been utterly undone. For though the nation was highly diſſatisfied with his meaſures, they were ſtrongly attached to his perſon and government; and many ſo devoted to him, and to his family's intereſt, as to be inſenſible of their own danger: ſo that, if he had maintained the dignity of his crown, and truſted to the affections of his ſubjects and the honour of his army; if he had annulled his illegal deeds; if he had not been bereaved of courage and conduct when he ſtood moſt in need of both; and if he had not diſbanded his army, and poorly run away, we had probably been obliged to put up with ſuch ſecurity as could have been obtained, and in all probability with a very precarious ſecurity for our civil and religious rights. But ſo it happened, I ought rather to ſay, ſo it was ordered of God, that he himſelf in effect gave the nation the only ſecurity to be depended on, by his own miſconduct. Partly through fear, and partly through pride and obſtinacy, partly through the advice of evil counſellors, and partly through the ſuggeſtions of his own heart, he betook himſelf to the alliance of our moſt dangerous enemy, threw up the adminiſtration,

and

vidence, are handed down to you from diſtant progenitors: "For they got them not "by their own ſword, nor did their own "arm ſave them; but his right hand, and "his holy arm, and the light of his coun-"tenance, becauſe he had a favour unto "them." And the better to diſpoſe you to this duty, let me only put you in mind, that, after many violent and long-continued ſtruggles betwixt the prerogative of the crown and the liberties of the people, in which all that is dear to us was at ſtake, it pleaſed God to call to the ſucceſſion of the crown a race of princes, of whoſe good affections to our civil and ſacred rights we never once entertained the leaſt ſuſpicion; and to fill the throne at preſent with a prince who, in ſpite of the influence of fac-

and left the throne vacant to the only prince in Europe who could beſt defend us againſt invaſions from abroad, or inſurrections at home.

I would willingly paſs over in ſilence the many unfortunate attempts made by our deluded countrymen to reinſtate the abdicated family; but that we are bound to keep in record the various deliverances wrought for us, as a debt of gratitude for which we are ſtrictly accountable; remembering that we are never ſafe but under the protection of the ſame kind Providence which hath conveyed our ſacred and civil rights, through a variety of dangers, to the preſent happy period.

tion and prejudice, is poſſeſſed of the love and eſteem of his ſubjects, the friend of religion and virtue, the friend of mankind, the father of his people, and the true vicegerent of that God to whoſe worſhip and obedience he is devoted.

Look around you, my brethren, on a numerous and flouriſhing people, ſecure in every bleſſing of every kind by the beſt conſtitution of government, executed by the beſt and moſt amiable of princes. Behold a ſpirit of induſtry, of inquiry, of independence, of equity, and humanity, and, oh! that I could add, of true religion, diffuſing itſelf through all ranks; the great diſarmed, not only of the power, but of the will, to oppreſs or inſult their inferiors; and every ſociety and every individual at liberty to purſue their intereſt without dread or moleſtation. How different this from the condition of thoſe, whoſe induſtry is checked by the rapine of ſuperiors, and the tools of ſuperiors, whoſe perſons and property are the ſubjects of cruel exaction, whoſe very conſciences are not exempted from arbitrary command, and who by a total forgetfulneſs of what is due to the dignity of human nature, are taught to rejoice in

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their ſlavery! Shall we envy them their bright ſun and unclouded ſky, their wines or their oil, their ſilver or gold or diamonds? No: let us thank God, who with a bountiful hand diſpenſes his gifts as to him ſeemeth beſt, giving different bleſſings to different nations, and diſtinguiſhing us by the beſt.

"Thine, O Lord, is the greatneſs, and "the power, and the majeſty: for all that "is in the heaven and in the earth is thine. "Thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou "art exalted as head above all. Both riches "and honour come of thee, and thou "reigneſt over all; and in thine hand is "power and might; and in thine hand it "is to make great, and to give ſtrength "unto all. Now, therefore, our God, we "thank and bleſs thy glorious name."

In the *ſecond* place, let me caution you againſt over-rating your privileges, or over-valuing yourſelves upon account of them; for the ſame hand that gave, can take them away. "O houſe of Iſrael, cannot I do "with you as this potter? ſaith the Lord. "Behold, as the clay is in the potter's "hand, ſo are ye in mine hand, O houſe "of Iſrael. At what inſtant I ſhall ſpeak

"concerning

"concerning a nation, and concerning a "kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, "and to deſtroy it: if that nation againſt "whom I have pronounced, turn from "their evil, I will repent of the evil that I "thought to do unto them. And at what "inſtant I ſhall ſpeak concerning a nation, " and concerning a kingdom, to build and "to plant it: if it do evil in my ſight, "that it obey not my voice, then I will re-"pent of the good wherewith I ſaid I "would benefit them." "Therefore be not "high-minded, but fear." We may talk of our internal ſtrength and foreign alliances, of our maritime force, which is indeed our glory and defence, and of the brave and independent ſpirit of our people; but we ought to remember, "that the Moſt "High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and "giveth it to whomſoever he will." What veſtiges now remain of Tyre and Carthage? And what wrought the deſolation of thoſe once great and flouriſhing ſtates? What poor remains do we now ſee of the much-admired republics of ancient Greece, thoſe ſeats of learning and elegant arts? And to what a wretched condition is Rome, the nurſe of heroes, and miſtreſs of the world, reduced?

reduced? And where are the ſeven churches of Aſia, in the midſt of which the Son of God once walked? And behold God's choſen people caſt out of his protection, and ſcattered over the face of the earth for their infidelity and impiety: "And take heed, "leſt if God ſpared not them, he alſo "ſpare not you."

Politicians will tell you, that kingdoms and ſtates, like animals and vegetables, have their fixed period; their infancy, maturity, and natural decline. But politicians are often over-wiſe, and from a fond deſire of reducing all events to their own principles, overlook that which beſt deſerves their attention, the moral government of God. Theſe nations have for a few centuries paſt made great proficiency in arts and induſtry. Are they therefore nearer their downfall? Perhaps they are. But can the deepeſt politician ſet bounds to their progreſs, or fix the period at which they *muſt* decline? He cannot. "For if we "will amend our ways, and our doings "that are not right," we may ſtand, we may flouriſh, advance, and improve in every uſeful and laudable art, as much beyond our preſent attainments, as we have gone

gone beyond the attainments and expectations of thoſe who came before us. On the other hand, if we go on to forget God, " and to caſt his laws behind our backs," and to put contempt on the riches of his grace diſplayed in the goſpel of his Son, we will, in ſpite of every expedient, and in ſpite of all the efforts of our ableſt ſtateſmen and patriots, ſink in our commerce, ſink in our ſpirit, ſink in our figure, and ſink under the divine diſpleaſure, into a ſtate of weakneſs and meanneſs below thoſe nations we hold in greateſt contempt.

Allow me, then, with all the freedom and earneſtneſs which the caſe requires, to expoſtulate with all ranks, concerning certain things which are amiſs, and call for a ſpeedy reformation. In juſtice to thoſe of high rank, it muſt be admitted, that beſides particular characters which ſhine with an amiable luſtre of piety and virtue, there is a certain dignity and delicacy of manners, accompanied alſo with a decency towards religion, which, if not univerſal, is not uncommon. But two things unbecoming their ſtation I cannot paſs over, namely, the too favourable reception given to frivolous cavils againſt the truths of religion,

and

and the too little regard that is paid to its ſacred inſtitutions. The contemptuous neglect of religious duties in men of character, is ſurely a corruption of manners peculiar to this age, if not alſo to this nation, and has riſen of late to an uncommon height: for nothing is more common, than to ſee people of figure, and thoſe who aſpire to rank and diſtinction, affecting a moral character, without the ſmalleſt pretenſions to religion.

To ſpeak diſreſpectfully of ſocial virtue, would ill become a preacher of that religion which injoins and inculcates it as the beſt expreſſion of our piety to God. On the other hand, to behave towards Almighty God, as one to whom we owed no regard, or but ſmall regard, not ſo much as is always ſhown to thoſe on whom we depend, or to whom we ſtand indebted for favours; and to grow remiſs in our regards to him, in proportion as we grow delicate, aſſiduous, and punctual, in our attention to one another, is a corruption of manners ſo groſs, and of an aſpect ſo threatening, as cannot be paſſed over in ſilence, or ſpoke of in the terms which one would chuſe.

It were to be wiſhed, that the authors of thoſe many tracts on moral virtue which have appeared of late, had done juſtice to their ſubject; and that in making the good of ſociety an object to the human heart, they had not forgot to inculcate a juſt regard to him who reigns in the kingdom of men; and in delineating the various duties of life, that they had put in a true and full light that love, fear, truſt, and obedience, which as moral agents, and members of human ſociety, we owe to Almighty God; for the minds and manners of men are not formed by tranſient hints, but by truths which are put full in their view, and rendered the objects of habitual attention: it were to be wiſhed, I ſay, and with reaſon it might be expected, that they would have avoided a fault which they complain of in others, and guarded againſt that narrowneſs of mind which has always proved pernicious to religion and virtue. But by an ungoverned zeal they run into an error ſimilar to the error of thoſe who went before them. For, as in the preceding age, it was attempted to form men to religion without virtue; ſo, in the preſent age, attempts have been made to form them to virtue without religion.

Whether

Whether it is owing to an happy conſtitution of civil government, which lays us under a neceſſity of treating one another with juſtice and humanity; or to a regular and far-ſpread commerce, which makes theſe virtues of conſequence to a man's credit and intereſt; or to the many diſſertations on morals accommodated to the taſte of the times; or to the united force of all theſe cauſes,—certain it is, that the preſent age abounds with pretenders at leaſt to morality without religion, beyond what is known in any other period, one only excepted, the period I mean in which the Roman people having degenerated from the virtues of their anceſtors, and riſen at the ſame time to a prodigious pitch of wealth and grandeur, ſunk under their own weight. For it was then that the Romans began to ſeparate religion from virtue, and neglecting one, to make high pretenſions to the other. Cicero, on whoſe teſtimony we can depend, informs us, that in his time the Epicureans were of all others the moſt numerous ſect of philoſophers; and though on all occaſions he treats their doctrines with great contempt and indignation, yet he acknowledges, that many of thoſe who embraced

them, were men of eſtimable characters. How nearly we approach the ſtate of this people, and what ground we have to dread their fate, I will not take upon me to determine; but the reſemblance is ſuch as demands our attention; and they who have a real concern for the ſafety of their country, would do well to lay it to heart: for in truth we have too juſt ground to fear, that the high pitch of proſperity and grandeur to which we are arrived, will not be of long continuance; for we have been unmindful of God, and lightly eſteemed the rock of our ſalvation. A dark cloud hangs over our heads which few attend to, and none are able to diſpel.

As to thoſe who hold the middle and lower ranks of life, they have the happineſs, and a real happineſs it is, to be out of the reach of thoſe artificial reaſonings and refinements by which the underſtandings of their ſuperiors are abuſed and perverted, and to be left to the ſole direction of ſcripture and common ſenſe. It is the privilege of your ſtation to think highly of religion; and if your temper and manners correſpond to your ſentiments, we have nothing to fear: for you make the body of

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the people, and the ſtrength of the nation; and on your good behaviour do our ſafety and happineſs under God depend. There are numbers amongſt you whoſe cordial affection and firm attachment to religion cannot be doubted. But it may not be improper to ſuggeſt a thought which perhaps will not occur to yourſelves, namely, that though it may not be poſſible to alienate your hearts from religion, it is not at all impoſſible to ſubſtitute ſomething in its place that will produce nearly the ſame effects; ſomething in the guiſe of religion, that will take all your attention, ingroſs all your affection, and make you not only loſe ſight of your main object, but in ſome inſtances to act againſt it. An exceſs of zeal of any kind is not indeed the reigning folly of the preſent times: however, it is not amiſs that the friends of religion, its warmeſt friends eſpecially, be appriſed, that the great enemy of mankind hath the art of throwing in ſometimes one thing, and ſometimes another, as ſuits mens temper and circumſtances, to catch their hearts; well knowing, that if they once fix on that, they will part with any thing rather than it, ſacrifice almoſt any thing to it, and hardly

hardly admit the plaineſt and moſt important truths that do not fall in with it. Of this I could give you proofs in abundance, were it neceſſary, in the hiſtory of the church from the days of the apoſtles to the preſent time.

What then, you will ſay, would you have us to be altogether unconcerned about public meaſures? By no means. But there are certain duties of religion in which all are agreed, and certain capital truths which have the ſtamp of divine authority, that better deſerve to be the object of zeal, than opinions and practices, however momentous they may appear, about which good Chriſtians may and do differ. You do not give ſo undoubted a proof of your ſincerity by the zeal you ſhow for your own opinions, however juſt they may be, as for the plain preſcriptions of Chriſt and his apoſtles. You have not the ſame reaſon to expect the countenance of God in promoting the one as the other; nor will your zeal for the one be ſo acceptable in the ſight of all men, as that for the other; nor does religion conſiſt ſo much in the one as in the other. We do not require you to drop all concern about other matters; but if we

could

could prevail on you to transfer the ardor and induſtry which is ſometimes employed about diſputable points, in cultivating thoſe diſpoſitions wherein it is confeſſed religion doth conſiſt, and in bringing them to their proper pitch, then ſhould we ſee a change to the advantage, not only in yourſelves, but in all around you: for religion, true religion, when it ſhines forth in the temper and manners of its profeſſors, hath a power over the hearts and conſciences of men that is not eaſily withſtood. Nor is this our advice only, but an expreſs injunction of an apoſtle of Chriſt, Rom. xiv. 16. 17. 18. 19. "Let not your good be evil ſpoken of. For "the kingdom of God is not meats and "drinks, but righteouſneſs, and peace, and "joy in the Holy Ghoſt. For he that in "theſe things ſerveth Chriſt, is acceptable "to God, and approved of men. Let us "therefore follow after things that make "for peace, and wherewith one may edify "another."

And now, if I am to take it for granted, that all the cordial friends of religion will endeavour to do honour to their profeſſion, by excelling in thoſe virtues that are acceptable to God, and approved of men;

men;—if I am to take this for granted, (and why ſhould I not?), there are two things I would offer in the way of advice. Firſt, That you ſhould be on your guard againſt injurious thoughts of yourſelves; and, 2dly, That you ſhould guard againſt injurious and unworthy thoughts of your Lord and maſter.

And, firſt, with regard to yourſelves, you may condemn yourſelves for your faults and failures, and be humbled under a ſenſe of your manifold infirmities, as you ſee cauſe; and great cauſe the beſt of you will have for ſo doing; but, at the ſame time, if you are conſcious to yourſelves of a ſteady endeavour to do better, accompanied with a dependence on Chriſt for aſſiſtance and acceptance, you ought not to entertain the leaſt doubt or ſuſpicion of your ſincerity: for that is not humility, but weakneſs and folly, and one of the chief artifices by which your adverſary would weaken your confidence in God, and thereby deprive you of thoſe aids which you would otherwiſe obtain.

And then, with regard to your bleſſed Saviour, you ought to guard againſt injurious and unworthy thoughts of him, reſpecting

ſpecting the church in general, or your-ſelves in particular. You muſt not judge of his kind regards to you by the ſcanty meaſures of your love to him: for though a ſtrict regard is had to this in the moral government of God, yet his favour to us far ſurpaſſes our moſt dutiful behaviour toward him. Remember, that the prophets foretold, that he would not break the bruiſed reed, nor quench the ſmoking flax; that he would carry the lambs in his boſom, and gently lead thoſe that are with young. And remember, how exactly his treatment of his firſt diſciples correſponded to this character. His patience was often and much exerciſed with their ſlowneſs of heart to believe: and yet, on every glimpſe of candor and docility which they diſcovered, how did he cheriſh, encourage, and inſtruct them, ſaying, Bleſſed are your eyes for they ſee, and your ears for they hear! Again, if you are conſcious to yourſelves of a dependence on him, accompanied with a ſteady endeavour to pleaſe him, it would be extremely injurious to doubt his aiding, ſupporting, and ſtrengthening you, and making you in the end more than conquerors. For if the doubt ariſes from a

ſenſe of guilt and unworthineſs, you are injurious to the merit of his obedience and ſufferings; and if it ariſes from the oppoſition you meet from without, or from within yourſelves, you are injurious to the power of his grace, that mighty power whereby he is able to ſubdue even all things to himſelf. And then with regard to the church in general, people will tell you of a thouſand difficulties which render the ſucceſs of religion impoſſible in this age and nation. But do not believe them; for the kingdom of God has riſen from the moſt unpromiſing appearances, and has ſtood, and ſpread, and flouriſhed, over the belly of a thouſand impoſſibilities, if I may ſay ſo, for ſeventeen hundred years and upwards; and will ſtand and prevail till all the prophecies and promiſes of God are accompliſhed. And though you ſhould not live to ſee the deſire of your hearts, and though God may do with this church and nation as to him ſeemeth meet; yet know, that when a few more days and years are paſt and gone, you ſhall have the inconceivable joy of ſeeing the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, and being made like him, and will have the honour of attending him when he comes

comes to be glorified in his ſaints, and to be admired of thoſe who love him.

And now, my brethren, having ſpoke with ſo much freedom to others, I muſt be excuſed if I addreſs myſelf with the ſame plainneſs and freedom to you. Nay, I would be to blame if I did not: for as others have their faults and defects, ſo we have ours; and we are under a peculiar obligation to exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day, leſt any of us be hardened through the deceitfulneſs of ſin. We are, thank God for it, irreproachable in our morals, as much ſo as can be expected in ſo large a body of men, and more ſo perhaps than could well be expected in ſo licentious an age. But that is not enough. As it is not enough that a ſoldier is not a coward, or that a judge or magiſtrate is not a profligate; ſo neither is it enough that a miniſter of the goſpel is above the imputation of groſs vice. A certain delicacy of ſentiment and dignity of manners becomes certain perſons, and is indiſpenſable to their utility and ſucceſs; and in none more ſo than in thoſe who treat with men in the name of God upon the concerns of their immortal ſouls. You know that

certain liberties of ſpeech and behaviour, which paſs unobſerved in others, detract from our character; and that a certain gravity of deportment, and purity of manners, little minded by the generality of mankind, is rigorouſly exacted of thoſe who ſpeak and act in the name of the Lord Jeſus Chriſt; and I could urge you to guard againſt the one, and to cultivate the other, by arguments which you could not reſiſt: but, keeping to the deſign of my diſcourſe, I will content myſelf with inſiſting on one argument, which I know to be of weight with you all, the regard that is due to our happy conſtitution, and thoſe privileges civil and religious by which the providence of God hath diſtinguiſhed us. Every one will grant, that the better you acquit yourſelves as the miniſters of Chriſt, you will contribute the more to the preſervation and ſecurity of theſe privileges: to which I will add an obſervation, which perhaps will not be agreed to at firſt, but will be found a great truth, namely, That the right diſcharge of our office is of more conſequence in averting the evils with which we are threatened, and continuing the advantages

of

of which we are poſſeſſed, than any other expedient that can be deviſed.

Had the clergy of Great Britain been a little on their guard againſt idle ſpeculation, and more idle diſputes, ſo as to bend the whole force of their genius to the end of their office, the making men wiſe and good; were they as ſkilful in touching the ſprings of the human heart, as they are in managing a debate; and did they ſhine in every grace and virtue as much as they do in every branch of literature,—we would not hear ſo much as we do about the proſtitution of conſcience, and the little regard had to principle; nor would it be made a queſtion, as I am ſorry to find it is a queſtion, Whether the people of Great Britain are poſſeſſed of the ſpirit of their conſtitution? This is aſcribing more influence than ſome people are willing to allow to the miniſters of religion, or even to religion itſelf; but when we have got above ſome fooliſh prejudices propagated by wrong-headed or evil-minded men, what I have ſaid will be found a great truth, and perhaps too late. And if the ſame kind Providence which interpoſed ſo often for our ſafety in former ages, will raiſe up patriots

triots with ſpirit and capacity ſuited to the exigencies of our ſtate, the due execution of our office will not be regarded as a matter of ſmall concern to the public, and foreign to the views of an able ſtateſman. In the mean time, let us do all in our power to qualify ourſelves for rendering that ſervice we owe to our country, and beſtow our chief care on thoſe accompliſhments which beſt become our office, and will turn to greateſt account.

Take a leſſon, my brethren, from the Romiſh clergy; for "the children of this "world are wiſer in their generation than "the children of light." Neither their riches, nor power, nor pageantry, would give them ſuch hold as they have of the minds of the people, if they did not take all due care to preſerve the appearance at leaſt of goodneſs. Nor would the ſeverity of manners, ſo conſpicuous in their religious orders, be ſufficient to ſupport them, if they had not, as undoubtedly they have, bright examples among them of genuine and ſublime piety. So that piety, real or apparent, is the main ſupport of their ſyſtem; or genuine piety rather is the keyſtone on which the whole fabric reſts: and whenever

whenever it fails, as it did remarkably at the Reformation, the whole will come to the ground.

Far be it from me to diſparage any accompliſhments which may facilitate your labours in public or private; and God forbid that this church ſhould ever fall under the direction of illiterate and low-bred teachers: but with all the other accompliſhments we can pretend to, if one is wanting, we ſhall ſoon be found good for little but to be caſt out and troden under foot of men. Mankind will love, eſteem, and honour miniſters of the goſpel, in proportion as they reſemble their bleſſed Maſter, and have the ſkill of winning their hearts to his love and obedience; and you will do good to the hearts of others in proportion to the goodneſs of your own hearts; and your hearts will be repleniſhed with the grace of God, in proportion as you lay them open to him in thoſe ſacred offices to which you are conſecrated, and for the ſake of which you are ſeparated and ſet apart from the world. You will be careful then, my brethren, to maintain, not only a decent behaviour before men, but in private and in ſecret to maintain an intercourſe

with

with your Father in heaven, that from him you may derive theſe gifts and graces of his Spirit, which will enable you to check the prevailing corruptions of the times, and to ſhine as lights in the world. And when the chief Shepherd ſhall appear, you alſo will appear with him in glory, and will then ſhine forth in the kingdom of your Father, like the brightneſs of the firmament, and as the ſtars for ever and ever.

LETTERS.

ADVERTISEMENT.

Many truths of conſequence, which could not be ſufficiently illuſtrated in the Sermon, are unfolded and vindicated in the following Letters from the author to a friend, who had the Sermon under conſideration ſome time before it was preached.

LETTER I.

YOU ſeem to think, that I have complimented my audience at the expence of the bulk of mankind; but on due attention to the preſent ſtate of things, you will find, that I have ſaid nothing but what is ſtrictly true. Do you think I could have called our civil conſtitution *the work of God* before any other audience, without many qualifying terms, and much circumlocution, to ſecure me againſt the cenſure of enthuſiaſm, from thoſe who pretend to be wiſer than the vulgar? I certainly could not. And yet I will own, that this wrong turn of thinking, which prevails ſo much, is leſs the fault of the people than of their leaders: for the generality of thoſe who embrace the great principles of religion, are diſpoſed to eye God in all events; and are capable, under proper direction, of contemplating with high admiration the divine perfections, as they are diſplayed in the works of nature and providence. But on this ſubject, as on many others, they are put wrong by thoſe who take upon them to form their ſentiments. The zealous divines of the laſt age were, you know, ſtrict obſervers of the ways of providence, pronounced boldly on every ſtep, and drew concluſions for the direction of their conduct, too much akin to thoſe formed by ancient ſages from the motions of the heavenly bo-

dies, and other omens. This falſe way of thinking has been detected and diſgraced in the preſent age; and, as is common, a way of thinking equally falſe in the other extreme is put in its place. He is now the man of wiſdom, who can reſolve all events into the laws of nature, the humours and paſſions and contrivances of men, and even into chance, with little or no reference to the wiſdom, or juſtice, or goodneſs of God. And ſo prevalent is this plan of thinking, that hardly will you be allowed to aſcribe any event to the appointment of God, which they can in any manner reſolve into other cauſes. But is this common ſenſe?

If a man receives a valuable preſent from his friend in the Eaſt Indies, he does not think much of the way of conveyance, but of the generoſity of his friend: Or if he trace the care and judgment with which his friend has ſent the preſent ſafe to hand, he does not ſtop there, but is filled with an affectionate ſenſe of his continued friendſhip. When you take into conſideration, as I know you often do, the various meaſures employed by your father to place you in the ſtate in which you find yourſelf, eſpecially the ſteps he took to form your mind and manners, do you ever loſe ſight of the judicious friend and affectionate parent; and does not your heart ſwell with filial gratitude at every ſtep you take? And if ſo, why all this delicacy of riſing up from ſubordi-

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nate cauſes to the ſupreme? What means this ſhyneſs of mentioning the government of God?

I was unwilling to impute it to impiety; and am perſuaded, that it is in a great meaſure owing to a weakneſs very incident to the human mind, of running from one extreme into another. It is not, however, to be excuſed on that account; becauſe it robs God of the glory, and man of the ſatisfaction and benefit ariſing from a juſt regard to the ways of providence. The preſent mode of reſolving all events into ſubordinate cauſes, without regard to the ſupreme, may be conſidered as an exact counterpart to the affectation of reſolving all events into the will of God, without regard to ſettled laws, which prevailed in the preceding age; and as one was productive of ſuperſtition, ſo is the other of atheiſm, or of a forgetfulneſs of God, which has nearly the ſame effect: And ſince both are at an equal diſtance from true philoſophy and good ſenſe, they are equally intitled to the contempt of mankind. Will our men of delicacy indulge me the ſame liberty in pointing out the follies of the preſent age, which they commonly take in expoſing the weakneſs of their predeceſſors? I am afraid they will not. But I know that you will; and therefore I ſhall give you my thoughts on theſe ſubjects without reſerve or diſguiſe.

LETTER II.

TO ſatisfy you that we have not fully imbibed the ſpirit of our religion, be pleaſed to caſt your eyes on that multiplicity of ſects, or of true churches, as they affect to call themſelves, into which Proteſtants are divided. Next to reconciling us to God, the great end of our Saviour's coming into the world was to reconcile us to one another, and to form upright men into one body, of which he himſelf is the head; and accordingly he has injoined all the members of this ſociety, as they have opportunity, to partake of the ſacred ſymbols of his body and blood, in teſtimony of their union with him, and with one another. But have they indeed done ſo, or do they ſhow any diſpoſition to do it? Have they not, on the contrary, drawn off from one another, formed themſelves into ſeparate ſocieties, and refuſed to give this teſtimony of their union, ſo expreſsly required by the author of their religion? Are there not men of integrity who will not come to the ſame holy table with men of integrity; with thoſe whom in their conſciences they believe to be ſuch; in direct contradiction to the ſpirit of their profeſſion? Will you ſay, that theſe people underſtand the Chriſtian religion? Or, if they do, are they poſſeſſed of the ſpirit of Chriſtianity?

I know that certain profeſſors of Chriſtianity, of whom I incline to think well, excuſe themſelves from holding communion with thoſe whom they allow to be as good Chriſtians as themſelves, on account of certain wrong opinions, which, as they think, are entertained by them about ſome religious truths, or ſome wrong meaſures they have gone into in promoting the intereſts of religion. But I appeal to you, if this can be conſidered as an excuſe. Has their Lord and Maſter diſpenſed with their fulfilling this duty on conſiderations of this kind? He has forbid them to hold communion with thoſe who deny his being the Son of God, and with thoſe who, though they pay him that acknowledgment, yet lead immoral lives. Has he excluded any others from their ſociety, or has he authoriſed them to exclude others? Or can they excuſe themſelves to him, for withdrawing from the communion of thoſe whom he has not excluded? If the Lord Jeſus Chriſt hath expreſsly injoined all thoſe who acknowledge him to be the Son of God, and live good lives, to commemorate his death together in a ſacred feaſt, what opinion ſhall one entertain of the religion of thoſe who, on various pretences of their own, refuſe to fulfill this duty; and of thoſe who ſcruple more to hold communion with perſons againſt whom they think fit to make exceptions, than with them who are excepted by the Lord Jeſus Chriſt?

I am extremely glad, that the different ſects treat one another in a better manner than they were wont to do, and rejoice in the exerciſe of humanity and civility that every day gains ground among people of different perſuaſions; but am ſorry that the ſame, and much greater effects are not produced by religion, than thoſe which we muſt aſcribe to other principles; and ſhall not think that we have imbibed the ſpirit of our profeſſion, till all good Chriſtians give that teſtimony of their friendſhip and brotherly love which is expreſsly required by their Lord and Maſter.

Talk not to me of tenderneſs of conſcience: for I am perſuaded, that the evil complained of flows from a certain callouſneſs with regard to this duty, which many, otherwiſe good people, have contracted through falſe notions and bad example: And I have a right to ſay ſo; becauſe from many trials I have made on people of various ways of thinking, I have always found an amazing inſenſibility to the obligation, which ariſeth from the expreſs command of the Lord Jeſus Chriſt. Nor do I expect it ſhould be otherwiſe, till the teachers of religion take the ſame pains to inculcate a juſt regard to the expreſs declarations of ſcripture, which they have ſo often employed in promoting the particular diſtinguiſhing tenets of their ſeveral ſects.

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LETTER III.

DO you indeed conſider this as a freethinking age? Many pretend to freedom of thought; but how many are there who underſtand what it means? Have you met with many who are capable of admitting obvious truth, and rejecting palpable abſurdity, on all ſubjects without heſitation; and who in doubtful caſes can ſuſpend their judgment, and maintain an equilibrium, till they have examined the evidence propoſed, with one half of the care and honeſty practiſed by thoſe who ſell cinnamon and cloves? We are over-run with ſceptics; but how many have you found who are ſuch in reality? They will doubt the truth of your opinion, and the juſtneſs of your reaſoning, but not of their own. They are ſlow and backward in admitting the ſtrongeſt arguments in favour of religion, but briſk and forward in offering all manner of objections to its truth and credibility. They heſitate and balance on your propoſing obvious truths, and facts that are inconteſtable; but inſiſt pertinaciouſly on arbitrary ſuppoſitions and downright chimeras. I am unwilling to call this diſpoſition, which you know to be common, by its proper name; but muſt think that it has a ſtronger tendency to extinguiſh common ſenſe and common honeſty, than the ſuppoſed blind bigotry of our anceſtors;

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and will take upon me to affirm, that freedom of thought is a privilege too high to be common.

Many modern believers are ſomehow as ambitious of the character of freethinking as ſceptics and infidels themſelves; and with no better title. With what pride and petulancy do they obtrude their novel notions on all companies, when it is apparent they have it not in their power to depart a hair-breadth from the hypotheſis in vogue! I know you have often made the experiment, ſometimes for amuſement, and ſometimes from a higher principle, and would be glad to hear of your ſucceſs. They underſtand the preſent hypotheſis; they can explain it; and will maintain its fundamental tenets with a variety of arguments: but can they perceive its defects, or can you make them ſuſpect that it labours under any? What number of people of ſenſe and education have you found, who can give up falſehood as ſoon as it is detected, and are diſpoſed to purſue truth in every track in which it may be diſcovered? Some ſuch I know there are, but am afraid not many; not ſufficient to make a decent appearance as a ſect. I could ſoon reckon up all of that character with whom I have had the happineſs to get acquainted.

Do not all Proteſtants pretend to the right of private judgment, and do you know any number of them who do or can uſe this right? If the unlearned, and I will add, the half-learned, would be ſo wiſe as to confine themſelves to doctrines

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they underſtand, they might find in the ſcriptures a large ſyſtem of ſacred truths, on which they could venture their ſalvation with great ſafety, without any dependence on fathers or councils, or on the whole body of the learned. But if they will needs go out of their depth, they muſt lean on thoſe who are able to ford the paſſage. Is there a body of Proteſtants who have not adopted certain tenets as articles of faith, that cannot be deduced from ſcripture or reaſon, without a degree of critical ſkill and metaphyſical knowledge far beyond what the bulk of believers are poſſeſſed of? Our Saviour hath expreſsly diſcharged us to call any man on earth maſter; and yet you can eaſily trace the faith of a great many to ſome renowned doctor or body of doctors on earth, to whoſe *dogmata* they pay a regard, equal, if not ſuperior, to that which they ſhow for the expreſs declarations of holy writ. Now, when all theſe things are fairly conſidered, I deſire you would tell me, what pretenſions we have to this privilege of freethinking. I am ready to allow, and have ſaid, that we are making approaches towards candid judging; but you will find, I believe, that our progreſs is ſmall, and our approaches ſlow; and, further, that freedom of thought is not to be attained by thoſe frivolous pretenders, who value themſelves on having diſmiſſed exploded opinions with contempt, and adopted the hypotheſis in vogue with oſtentation. To be above the prejudices of the learned and

unlearned, of the polite and the vulgar, of the preſent as well as of the preceding age, is an attainment worthy the ambition of ingenuous minds; and is to be reached by ſuch; but not without patient inquiry, ſupported by courage, and accompanied with a conſiderable degree of common ſenſe and common honeſty.

P. S. I rejoice with you in the figure our countrymen have made of late; but as we have few men of leiſure for deep inquiry, we muſt regret its being given up in England; and hope, at the ſame time, that it cannot be long ſo, as it is impoſſible to manage the vaſt empire we are poſſeſſed of without deep thinking; nor can that take place, without bringing the profound ſciences into reputation.

I will take ſome other opportunity of ſatisfying you, that we have not made the proficiency we imagine in moral and theological knowledge; and, in the mean time, beg your remarks on the other topics of my ſermon which may be exceptionable, and about which I am principally concerned.

LETTER IV.

YOU do me no more than juſtice in believing, that I ſhould have no pleaſure in ſeeing men perſecuted for their opinions, however abſurd or fooliſh they might be; for beſides the inhumanity

inhumanity and ill policy of ſuch a courſe, I hold all methods of violence to be diſhonourable to the truth. At the ſame time, I cannot help expreſſing my diſpleaſure at the tameneſs with which believers ſuffer themſelves to be inſulted by infidels; becauſe it is unworthy of men of ſpirit, and hurtful to the public. If I am not allowed to conſider the generality of people of rank as real Chriſtians, I may at leaſt ſuppoſe them to have a reverence for religion, and may affirm, that, conſiſtently with honour or prudence, they ought not to be amuſed and entertained with idle jokes and artificial reaſonings, to the diſhonour of that God whom they reverence, and that divine perſon to whom they muſt betake themſelves in their laſt extremity: for I well know, that ſuch behaviour would be reckoned imprudent and diſhonourable with reſpect to any other perſon whom they acknowledge for their friend and patron.

I am not ignorant of the ſingularity of this way of thinking; but aſſure you, that it is not owing to a affectation. When the books you mention came firſt among us, I read them along with others; but could not agree with my contemporaries, that ſuch ſort of writing was good for any thing; and to this hour I cannot ſee the uſe of holding a conſtant debate about the truth of religion natural or revealed. Can the ſceptics of our day impugn the truth of religion with more advantage than was done by Porphyry, Celſus, Julian, and

others who lived near the time of the Chriſtian revelation? or can the advocates for religion offer more full defences than were long ſince offered by Juſtin Martyr, Tertullian, Origen, and others, who had ſome advantages which we cannot pretend to? Or if the controverſy ſhould be managed in a manner better ſuited to the taſte of the times, do you think that can make any difference in the judgment of a man of ſenſe? He believes the truths of natural religion, becauſe it is impoſſible for him to ſuppoſe the contrary; and he believes the truth of the Chriſtian revelation, becauſe it is impoſſible for him to conceive how it could have been received in the world, if its coming from God had not been fully atteſted; and he will not be determined by the ſubtile reaſoning or refined criticiſms of one ſide or other.

You know that the inſtitutions of Chriſtianity were not, like the rites of Heatheniſm, introduced gradually and inſenſibly in diſtant and remote ages, but were openly publiſhed, at a time when the world was in beſt condition to judge of their divine authority. They were not inforced by the ſword, as was the religion of Mahomet; but offered, on the authority of God, by men who had nothing elſe to truſt to. The miracles wrought in their atteſtation had not, like the miracles of the church of Rome, the prejudices of the vulgar and the countenance of the great to gain them credit; but were offered in the ſight of men

men who had the ſtrongeſt bias in the world, I mean their religious prejudices, againſt them, who could canvaſs them as ſtrictly as Lord Bolingbroke or Lord Shafteſbury could do, and were as good judges as they, whether this or the other blind or lame man was actually cured in the name of the Lord Jeſus Chriſt: and I defy any man of ſenſe to conceive the poſſibility of ſo many Heathens of all ranks, turning their backs on Jupiter, Juno, and Apollo, and following a divine perſon of the Jewiſh nation, if they had not been fully ſatisfied concerning his heavenly miſſion. In like manner, I defy any man of ſenſe to conceive the poſſibility, that ſo many of the Jewiſh nation ſhould have renounced the flattering proſpect of a Meſſiah who was to give them the empire of the world, for the ſake of one who was condemned as a blaſphemer by their rulers, and crucified as a malefactor at Jeruſalem, if they had not ſeen the moſt convincing evidence of the divine miſſion of this ſacred perſon. It is eaſy to believe, that men will *reject* evident truths that ſtand oppoſed to deep-rooted prejudices; becauſe we ſee it done every day: but we know no inſtance of mens *admitting* truths in oppoſition to ſuch prejudices, without the fulleſt and moſt complete conviction; nor can we conceive how they ſhould do it: at leaſt it is impoſſible to underſtand how this ſhould have been done, which we know was done by numbers of all denominations in all the different parts of the then known

known world, without the utmoſt poſſible ſatiſfaction. When I reflect on theſe things, I confeſs to you that I know not what people mean by holding a ſtated controverſy about the truth of the Chriſtian religion.

Let me ſuppoſe that your grandfather, or great-grandfather, had a law-ſuit with ſome neighbouring gentleman about a parcel of lands; that witneſſes had been examined; and writs looked into; the cauſe fully pleaded on both ſides; and that the judge determined in favour of your predeceſſor: let me further ſuppoſe, that after a deciſion by the inferior judges, the cauſe was brought by appeal to the ſupreme tribunal, and the ſentence affirmed: would you ſubmit after all this to a ſecond trial? If after a century or two you were required to produce writs and witneſſes, would you not inſiſt upon its being *res hactenus judicata?* and if your antagoniſt were ſo fooliſh as to complain of injury, would you not hold his allegation in ſovereign contempt? If indeed he could bring good evidence that the writs were forged, that the witneſſes had perjured themſelves, the judge was bribed or impoſed on, and that the ſentence was unjuſt, you would be bound in equity to reſtore him to his right; but on no other terms would a man of ſenſe and ſpirit give a claimant a hearing in the caſe ſuppoſed.

I have often wondered that the friends of Chriſtianity have not required infidels and ſceptics

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to prove the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, with reverence be it ſpoken, to be an impoſtor; and as it is well known that they neither can nor dare attempt to do this, I have as often wondered that they have not been branded as evil-ſpeakers and calumniators; for this is the treatment that would be given them if they ſhould uſe the ſame freedom with any other well-eſtabliſhed character: and I cannot ſee why men ſhould be indulged in treſpaſſes againſt common ſenſe and common decency in religion, which would not be ſuffered on any other ſubject.

You tell me of the light caſt upon religion by our controverſies with infidels; and I have allowed that we of the preſent age know beyond others wherein religion does not conſiſt; but with regard to that knowledge in which the life of religion lies, I confeſs it is my opinion that we have not gone beyond thoſe who went before us. Nor do I ſee that we could: for as the princes of Europe could not promote the cultivation of their lands, or poliſh the manners of their people, or perfect the police of their country, while they were engaged in a holy war againſt the infidels; ſo it was impoſſible that juſtice could be done to thoſe truths in which the ſalvation of men is concerned, when our able divines were ſo deeply engaged, as you know they have been, in a controverſy with infidels: and though I have the higheſt veneration for thoſe excellent perſons, who, with ſuch good intentions, and

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with ſo much learning and judgment, have maintained the truth of religion; yet I have often wiſhed they had been otherwiſe employed; becauſe I never thought their ſucceſs would be anſwerable to their labours and intentions.

I will take upon me to point out ſome of the effects of this controverſy, and leave you to judge if they are not real, and ſuch as might be expected from the manner in which it has been managed. By ſubjecting all truths without diſtinction to diſpute, men of real learning are ſometimes at a loſs for a teſt of truth in which they can reſt: Smatterers in learning have full ſcope given to a nauſeous pedantry even when they talk of religion and virtue; and many who cannot diſtinguiſh a ſophiſm from a ſyllogiſm, and know little or nothing of the hiſtory of the world, have the boldneſs and rudeneſs to impugn capital truths, or to throw out doubts and ſurmiſes about them, in a circle of Chriſtians, and ſometimes in the preſence of the beſt judges; and they alſo who believe, have not a faith proportioned to the evidence which belongs to the great doctrines of religion natural and revealed.

I readily agree with you, that no age ſince the publication of the Chriſtian religion, ſtood ſo much in need as the preſent of ſatisfaction concerning its divine authority; but after thinking long on the ſubject, I know not how this can be done, unleſs by an appeal to mens external ſenſes by miracles, or by an appeal to that internal perception

perception and feeling of obvious truth, by which we are diſtinguiſhed from idiots and the lower animals. But whether a people ſo long accuſtomed to hear the moſt undoubted facts and the moſt obvious truths called in queſtion, will ſtand to the laſt appeal, or whether they have any diſtinct idea of the tribunal appealed to, may be doubted; though from the opinion I have of the good ſenſe of the nation, and the extravagance into which ſceptics have run of later years, I hope they may; and that the authority of common ſenſe will at length put an end to a controverſy that is the diſgrace of modern times.

P. S. I am truly of the mind, that the indulgence ſhown to licentious writers is prejudicial to themſelves, as well as to the public; for I have a better opinion of many of them than to think, that they would have offered ſuch glaring abſurdities as they have offered to the world, if they had not found people of taſte and rank too much diſpoſed to be entertained with ſuch fooleries. What Lord Shafteſbury or Lord Bolingbroke might have done is uncertain; for they thought they had a right to dictate to the public. But I am perſuaded, that Mr Hume would not have ranked *broad ſhoulders* and *taper legs* among the virtues, would not have offered at a demonſtration of the impoſſibility of miracles, nor thrown out a great many crude paradoxical opinions with the freedom he has done, if he had not entertained a meaner opinion of the judgment of the public than he

ought to have done: and poor Rouſſeau would not have been p lted, and treated ſo contumeliouſly by an outrageous rabble, if he had been taught to reſpect the public judgment; for let the ſingularity of his turn of mind be as it will, he appears to have a fund of good ſenſe, by which he might have corrected himſelf, if he had been ſo diſpoſed, or if by proper authority, I mean the reverence due to the public, he had been laid under a neceſſity of doing ſo. Have you not ſeen youths of prompt but petulant ſpirits quite ſpoiled by the indulgence ſhown to their wild ſallies, who, under proper reſtraint, would have turned out men of ſenſe? — I miſtake my own heart, if I am not a friend to freedom of thought, and zealous for the liberty of the preſs; but I miſtake the preſent age, if they can on all ſubjects diſtinguiſh exactly between the freedom which belongs to a liberal mind, and the licentiouſneſs affected by the rabble.

LETTER V.

YOU are ſurpriſed that the writers of the preſent age ſhould be accuſed of narrowneſs of thought; but, in reality, are not mankind the ſame in all ages, ſhallow, ſhort-ſighted, raſh, and precipitant? You allow, that the writers of the laſt age did great harm by their partial

tial zeal; and if you will reflect on the many attempts in this age, to found ſyſtems of morality on ſprings of action independent of the will of God, or with little or no reference to it, and the mighty zeal to preſs the various obligations of ſocial virtue with little or no care to inculcate the duties we owe to God; — you will find, that ſome of our celebrated writers, however eſtimable in other reſpects, have proceeded with as little judgment, and as narrow views of things, as their predeceſſors. I do not alledge, that they intend to alienate mens hearts from the duties of religion, or to detach religion from virtue, and to make the one ſubſiſt without the other; but they certainly have proceeded as if this was their intention: and the effect has been anſwerable; for in all good companies you will hear encomiums on patriotiſm and public ſpirit, on humanity, and the other duties of ſocial life, with little or nothing in favour of religion, if not the contrary. You will find every where numbers of men formed to the practice of ſocial virtues, but with little or no regard to the duties of religion; and people of rank and figure, and all pretenders to diſtinction, affecting a delicacy of ſentiment and behaviour towards mankind, but acting with irreverent inattention and indifference towards God. I do not think that our people would ſay to the Almighty in expreſs terms, "Depart from us, for we deſire not the "knowledge of thy ways. What is the Al-

" mighty that we ſhould worſhip him, or what " profit ſhall we have by praying unto him ?" I believe they would be ſhocked at ſuch a declaration as this ; but their common behaviour correſponds ſo much to it, as brings to mind that terrible denunciation of the divine diſpleaſure on a like occaſion, " Shall I not viſit for theſe things, " ſaith the Lord ; and ſhall not my ſoul be aven- " ged on ſuch a nation as this ?"

Be aſſured, that our ſober thinking people are not ſo wiſe for themſelves, for their families, or for their native country, as they appear to be, in making light of that which was always of deep concern with legiſlators and wiſe men of all ages and nations. You remember the ſtory of Fabricius, who, at an entertainment given by Pyrrhus, having liſtened with ſurpriſe to Cineas, a Greek philoſopher, in his diſcourſe on the alluring ſentiments of Epicurus, who made pleaſure the chief good, and removed the gods at a diſtance from the affairs of men, turned quick to Pyrrhus, and cried out, " O Hercules ! may " Pyrrhus and the Samnites indulge this opinion " while they are at war with us !"

Did you ever hear of a people who preſerved their virtue after they laid aſide religion ? Among the Greeks and Romans it is remarkable, that virtue ſtood and fell with religion. " Rome " was a ſhip," ſays the Baron de Monteſquieu, " held by two anchors, religion and morality, in " the midſt of a furious ſtorm." In the early ages

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of the Roman ſtate, all ranks paid the higheſt regard to the public inſtitutions of religion; in which, though there were many things frivolous, abſurd, and barbarous, yet a ſenſe of moral government, and an expectation of future retribution, were preſerved, which had their effect; and, under their influence, appeared a race of patriots and heroes who have attracted the admiration of mankind. But when, in after ages, the refinements of falſe learning and of real luxury took place, men not only deſpiſed the ſuperſtition of their anceſtors, but with it, as is common, diſcarded the fundamental truths of religion; and then aroſe a race of perſons of a very different and oppoſite character, of high parts and deep capacity, but without virtue, who quickly wrought the ruin of their ſtate. When theſe things are fairly conſidered, you will not charge me, I believe, with too great ſeverity in cenſuring the ſpirit and manners of the times.

LETTER VI.

SO far am I from diſputing the poſſibility of a man's having a ſenſe of what he owes in juſtice or gratitude to his neighbour, without any ſenſe of the like obligations he is under to God, that I have no difficulty in conceiving, that an atheiſt may be an harmleſs, and perhaps a benevolent member of ſociety; though I affirm, and expect you

you will agree with me, that ſociety cannot ſubſiſt on the principles of atheiſm, nor without a competent number of perſons who exerciſe themſelves "in keeping a conſcience void of offence "towards God and towards all men." Partial virtue is not uncommon; and I allow, that the characters you mention are real; but will not admit a compariſon between them and the ancient ſages, whom they affect to imitate, and I hardly agree to the epithet you give them, of *honeſt men*.

A great diſtinction ought to be made between a Heathen philoſopher, who neglected certain eſtabliſhed modes of divine worſhip, becauſe he doubted their being required or accepted, and a modern fine gentleman, who acts the ſame part from an affectation of politeneſs, or from his being ſo much plunged in the cares and pleaſures of life, that he cannot attend to the duties of religion. The one is ſelf-condemned; the other was not. The conduct of the one is reconcileable with uprightneſs of heart; the conduct of the other is not ſo. The Chriſtian revelation has effects even on the minds of thoſe who do not cordially embrace it, that are not enough obſerved. Many duties of religion, little known or little attended to before, are put in too clear a light to be evaded by artifice of any kind. Neither the atheiſm of the Epicureans, nor the fataliſm of the Stoics, nor the ſcepticiſm of the Academics, can ſtand before the light of the goſpel; nor is it poſſible for any man

man of ſenſe, in a Chriſtian country, to live in the neglect of religion, without being wicked, and conſcious to himſelf in ſome degree of his own wickedneſs. It was otherwiſe with the philoſophers of Greece and Rome. They generally believed in a ruling mind, admired his works, and adored his perfections; but of his moral government, which is the foundation of practical religion, they had either no belief at all, or but a faint and doubtful perſuaſion. As they ſaw no exact diſtribution of rewards and puniſhments in this life, ſo they had diſputed themſelves into great uncertainty about the next; and therefore could not come to God "as a rewarder of them "that diligently ſeek him." Beſides, being ſhocked with the vulgar ſyſtem of religion, and unable to frame any to themſelves, they were in a manner conſtrained to do as they did. But can any man of common underſtanding and common education in Great Britain offer theſe pleas in excuſe of his impiety? He can with-hold his aſſent from the plaineſt truths; he can offer objections on objections, and one ſurmiſe after another, and raiſe a miſt before his eyes; he can very much pervert his own judgment:—but I appeal to his conſcience, whether, after all, he muſt not admit, that it is his duty to do homage to God, and to regulate his whole behaviour by a regard to his authority? And I refer him to himſelf, and to his own reflections, for his real character. Shew me a man, as ſtanch to whatever he believes

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to be his duty as was Cato, Brutus, or Ariſtides, and I ſhall allow him to be as virtuous as they; but if a man caſt off the fear of God, and indulge himſelf in practices which his conſcience condemns, he cannot be compared with the virtuous Heathens. He may be poſſeſſed of ſome amiable and uſeful qualities, which ought to have their juſt eſteem; but he has no pretenſions to *integrity*, if he has not that ſoundneſs of heart, that *mens ſibi conſcia recti*, which has always been held eſſential to this character.

The clergy may have committed errors, and thoſe too of a capital kind; but thoſe lay gentlemen who with much forwardneſs and ſelf-ſufficiency would take the helm into their own hands, ſhow their incapacity all at once, by running the veſſel, as I may ſay, upon the rocks: for what elſe have they done, than to make ſhipwreck of conſcience, and integrity of character, by encouraging men to neglect and diſregard religion, while it is not however in their power to free the mind from a ſenſe of its ſacred obligations? The force of wit and of eloquence, of pleaſantry and abſtruſe argumentation, has been employed to ſlacken, and, if poſſible, to looſe theſe bonds; but all in vain: for every man who thinks at all, is convinced in his conſcience that he ought to worſhip and obey God, and to prepare himſelf for an awful eternity; and if he neglects to do ſo, he is ſelf-condemned; or if he does not actually condemn himſelf, he feels himſelf

ſelf apprehenſive at the bottom of his heart that he is worthy of condemnation. Do but touch this part of his character, and you will find it a ſore place; expoſtulate with him in the ſofteſt manner on his neglect of his duty to God, and the concerns of his immortal ſoul, and he will heſitate and falter, evade and ſhuffle, and ſhow all the ſymptoms of a mind guilty to itſelf. Now, is this man virtuous? is he an honeſt man, taking honeſty in its true extent? and muſt the fate of Great Britain reſt on ſuch pillars as theſe? A woman may not be a proſtitute who holds a criminal correſpondence with one lover; but ſhe is not chaſte: a man forfeits the character of integrity, who, in any one inſtance, eſpecially in a capital caſe, lives in contradiction to the dictates of his mind; and as you would not truſt the honour of your family to a woman of blemiſhed reputation, ſo neither ſurely would you wiſh that the honour and intereſt of your native country ſhould be intruſted to ſuch characters as theſe.

LETTER VII.

IT was no doubt extremely proper to put moral virtue in all variety of lights, and to offer every argument in its favour which with reaſon and juſtice can be urged on the human mind; but it was not proper to ſuffer mankind to loſe

ſight of the ſupreme ruler of the world; becauſe a forgetfulneſs of our relation to him, of our dependence on him, and manifold obligations to his worſhip and obedience, has nearly the ſame effect with a denial or diſbelief of his exiſtence.

That vice is a contradiction to the truth of things, to their immutable reaſons and relations, and to that harmony, beauty, and dignity of action, which is as perceptible to the inward diſcernment as external beauty to the eye, is in ſome ſenſe a diſcovery of the preſent age, and a diſcovery of great value. But theſe reaſons and relations of things, as well as the things themſelves, come from God; and that beauty of virtue which we contemplate in theory, or admire in the character of a ſaint or hero, is but a faint imitation, or if you will, an emanation of the divine perfections. Why then do not our diſcoveries lead us to God, and terminate in his adorable excellency? What reaſon is there for diſjoining philoſophy from religion? The ſpeculations of philoſophy may be thought a more genteel exerciſe than the devotions of the religious; and the mode of the times is to give up religion, that we may devote ourſelves to virtue; but I appeal to common ſenſe. Is not a philoſopher bound by his profeſſion to conform himſelf to the order of things? and in tracing that order, if he cannot rightly ſtop till he has reached the firſt cauſe, I aſk again, why does he ſtop? Why does he not make thoſe very ſentiments, emotions, and affections,

ſections, which he has endeavoured to raiſe in the human mind, aright to terminate in God, the only ſource of being and excellence? Does he doubt that the contemplation of the divine perfections, either as they ſhine forth in the works of God, or, as the ſcripture beautifully expreſſes it, "in the face of Jeſus Chriſt," would beget an enthuſiaſm as ſteady and ſtrong, and every way as operative, as ever fired the breaſt of a Greek or Roman hero? If that perception of moral beauty and deformity which is congenial to the rational ſoul, can be made a ſpring of virtuous actions, may it not receive additional force, from the conſideration that it comes from God, and is a participation of that love of right and abhorrence of wrong which he poſſeſſes in abſolute perfection? And do you think that the effect would be ſmall, if proper care were taken to keep us in mind, that to promote the one and deſtroy the other, is the end of all his actings, the ſole object of his government, and the point in which all his infinitely diverſified diſpenſations meet and centre? that for this end he ſent his Son into the world; for this end he gave him up to death; for this end he raiſed him from the dead, and ſet him at his own right hand; and for this end he will ſend him again to the world with might and majeſty to reward the votaries of virtue and religion with inconceivable honour and happineſs, and to puniſh the diſobedient and unthankful with juſt ſeverity?

Theſe truths indeed are not of human invention; but they are ſo nearly allied, and ſo naturally connected with the diſcoveries and concluſions of reaſon, that I have often wondered that they are ſo little inſiſted on by philoſophers and philoſophical divines. They may be called old-faſhioned truths, and as ſuch be treated with neglect; but they are truths ſtill, and to thoſe who cordially admit them, will be ever delightful and operative; and in compariſon with them, I ſcruple not to ſay it, the talk of philoſophy about reaſons and relations of things in the abſtract, or even about the abſtract beauty and dignity of virtue, is but childiſh prattle; and when ſet up in competition or rivalſhip with theſe great truths, is worſe than childiſh.

Moſt gladly do I grant you, that virtue has an intrinſic worth, beauty, and dignity, and if you will, charms that ſhould be irreſiſtible; and that the human heart has a perception and feeling of theſe charms: but that mankind of any claſs or denomination do actually feel the charms of virtue, as quickly and ſenſibly as thoſe of power, of riches, pomp, and pleaſure, or that they can be brought to feel them ſo as to give them the preference to which they are intitled, till their groſſer affections are checked and ſubdued by the awful and weighty conſiderations of religion, this, I am perſuaded, you will not affirm. Such ſages as Lord Shafteſbury may talk of the diſintereſted love of virtue, as ſome divines do of the

the diſintereſted love of God: but he is no divine or philoſopher, but a viſionary, who in forming men to goodneſs and virtue, does not employ all the powers which religion, philoſophy, and common ſenſe afford; and thoſe patriots and moraliſts who make light of religion, either do not underſtand, or are not much affected about the intereſts of virtue or mankind.

You know me too well to ſuſpect me of derogating from the veneration due to the ſages of antiquity. I have already obſerved to you, that they were in a manner conſtrained to truſt the cauſe of virtue to its own inherent worth and dignity; and that worth, let me now obſerve, they underſtood clearly and felt ſenſibly; and have conveyed their ſentiments on this ſubject to poſterity in ſo maſterly a way, and with a ſpirit of true enthuſiaſm, that modern philoſophers would do well to imitate. But to copy their failings, to affect their ignorance, and by a pedantic imitation of them to act a part which we have reaſon to believe they would not have acted, is weak and ſilly. Shall we who are furniſhed with aids which they had not, truſt the cauſe of virtue to itſelf, becauſe the ancient philoſophers did ſo? Shall we who know, and in ſpite of all artifice muſt know, and believe, that God intereſts himſelf in the affairs of men, and will at laſt "ren-"der to every one according to his works;" ſhall we, I ſay, affect an independence on him and his government, and frame ſyſtems of morals or po-

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licy with little or no regard to the ſupreme ruler, becauſe they who were unacquainted with him did ſo? O ſervile imitators! And is not this the folly of Alexander the Great's courtiers, who would needs be wry-necked becauſe the king had that deformity?

LETTER VIII.

AFter ſo many invectives, which for ſo long a time have been thrown out, with more wit than judgment, againſt religion and its miniſters, one muſt appear ſingular and bold, who aſſerts, that the clergy can do more for the preſervation of our happy conſtitution than any other body of men. And yet the aſſertion, bold and ſingular as it may appear, is founded on two maxims, namely, That it is impoſſible to preſerve a free ſtate without virtue; and, That it is impoſſible to preſerve virtue without religion. The firſt of theſe maxims will be admitted by all who know any thing of the hiſtory of free ſtates; and if the other is not adopted by the wiſe of our day, it was however ſo uniformly and invariably adopted by wiſe men and legiſlators in all ages and nations, that the enemies of religion have made this an argument againſt its divine original. In reality, the idle and petulant talk againſt religion and the clergy, which has now almoſt reached to the vulgar, is owing to the little knowledge men have

of

of the maxims above mentioned. They ſeem to allow, that the labours of the clergy are neceſſary to give ſome check to groſs vices, and to preſerve the ſacred regard due to an oath, without which they know that ſociety cannot ſubſiſt; but have no notion, that the right diſcharge of their office is of indiſpenſable neceſſity for the preſervation of the Britiſh conſtitution, though that is an important truth with which every Britiſh ſubject ought to be acquainted.

In thoſe ſtates where the civil and military power is lodged with the chief magiſtrate, and in petty princes under him, the labours of the clergy are no otherwiſe neceſſary than to preſerve that reverence for the great, and that dread of power which is the chief engine of ſuch government: but in Great Britain, where the people have a right to judge, and where their general approbation or diſapprobation of meaſures is of more weight and force than all other authority whatever, the caſe is otherwiſe; for there all depends on the people's being conducted by wiſe and good principles; to which the clergy, if they diſcharge their duty as they ought, can ſurely contribute more than any other body of men. Good laws, well executed, (for when laws againſt profaneneſs are not put in execution, they embolden the vicious), may do much; and the worthy example of the great would do more, as men are governed by example more than by authority: but after all the good offices of this kind

kind which can be expected from magiſtrates and lawgivers, there will be room, ample room, for the labours of perſons in holy orders. If thoſe men of rank and power who take much liberty with the ſacred office, would give themſelves the trouble of forming the minds of the people to religion and virtue; or if they could find any claſs of men better qualified for this office than the clergy; they might with ſome countenance complain of their being a burden on the ſtate, and talk of ſetting them aſide: but without ſome precaution of this kind, they betray their ignorance of the ſpirit of our conſtitution, in talking contemptuouſly of the clergy in general.

In reality, the preſervation of our conſtitution does not depend ſo much as is imagined on great fleets and armies, on our miniſters of ſtate, our magiſtrates, or even our repreſentatives in parliament: but the preſervation of the Britiſh conſtitution, as of every other free ſtate, depends under God on the ſpirit of the people; for if that is right, other things will mend of courſe; and to preſerve the ſpirit of the people as pure, and untainted with vice and folly, as poſſible, ought to be the chief concern of every Britiſh patriot; and to that, I ſay it again, the clergy, if they do their duty, can contribute more than any other body of men.

One is aſtoniſhed at the ſhallow and ſuperficial reaſonings of many of our politicians about the fate of Great Britain. Great notice is taken of the

the height we have arrived at in riches and power, and from it alone our ſudden downfall is predicted; and the ſudden downfall of the Roman ſtate is brought in ſupport of the doctrine, without adverting to the difference in the riſe, which probably will make a difference in the fall of theſe two ſtates. The Romans roſe by arms, and the Britiſh by induſtry. By a few deciſive victories the Romans got the poſſeſſion, firſt of Greece, and then of Aſia, which, beſides a deluge of riches, gave them at once a vaſt unmanageable empire; but Britain has riſen gradually to riches and power by induſtry and commerce, and by a painful and aſſiduous application to thoſe uſeful arts which, under the protection of Almighty God, may maintain it in proſperity and ſplendor beyond any period of time which can be fixed by the deepeſt politician. Luxury is no doubt deſtructive ſo far as it goes; but it is difficult to conceive, how a buſy laborious people can be deſtroyed by luxury. Our trade will from time to time throw out overgrown eſtates, which too probably will be ſpent in vice and folly; and many of high birth, and opulent fortunes alſo, will probably be what ſuch people commonly are. But all theſe exceſſes may be conſidered as boils and blotches of the ſtate, which will diſcharge themſelves in the natural way; and if the middle and lower ranks are animated by a good ſpirit, and conduct themſelves by wiſe rules, we have nothing to fear. The principles of Chriſtianity

deeply ingraved on the heart, would be infinitely more powerful than the falſe honour of monarchy, than the human virtue of republics, or the ſervile fear of deſpotic ſtates, ſays the Baron de Monteſquieu. Is religion then of ſmall account with a Britiſh patriot? or are its miniſters of little conſequence to the ſafety of the ſtate? When our great men and lawgivers come to underſtand better, what is the ſpirit and ſtrength of the Britiſh conſtitution, and to have its preſervation more at heart, they will find themſelves concerned to render the ſacred office as beneficial to the public as poſſible: for the clergy, when they act as it becometh them, are undoubtedly the men on whom, under God, we can beſt depend for the preſervation of our happy conſtitution, becauſe they are beſt qualified to form the minds and manners of the people, not merely by teaching a ſyſtem of orthodox doctrine, which of itſelf can do little, nor by raiſing an affectionate zeal about modes of worſhip and government, which, God knows, has bred miſchief enough, but by imprinting on mens hearts ſuch a delicate ſenſe of duty towards their God and Saviour, towards one another, and towards all in authority, ſupreme or ſubordinate, as will reſtrain them from mad and licentious courſes, inſpire them with ſocial and public virtues, and produce that worthy behaviour on which, under God, our ſafety depends.

It is fit to liſten to whatever expedients are propoſed for our ſafety or proſperity: but if we are wiſe, and if we are not downright empirics, we will employ our chief care in guarding our vitals; for, if theſe are corrupted, we are undone. If the vulgar are ſuffered to be ignorant and licentious, and the middle ranks to affect the follies and vices of the great, their neglect of religion in particular;—if the prevailing turn of all ranks be to pleaſure, and to money, as the means of pleaſure;—and if through a continued ſucceſſion of buſineſs and pleaſure, there is little or no room left for the duties of religion, and no attention given to the dictates of conſcience, and the calls of God's word, — we are ruined paſt retrieve. We may then talk of debts and taxes, of the venality of the age, and the practices of miniſters of ſtate, and members of parliament; — but we will only talk. The body is, in that caſe, corrupted and rotten, as I may ſay, at the core, and in the nature of things, as well as in the righteous judgment of God, ripe for deſtruction: the ſpirit of our conſtitution is gone, and we are (God forbid it ſhould be the ſtate of this nation!) a mere carcaſs, on the point of diſſolution, or of being torn aſunder by thoſe beaſts and birds of prey who are ready to devour us.

LETTER IX.

I Grant, that the clergy cannot have much weight with thoſe who are altogether regardleſs of religion; but am unwilling to think, that there is a very great number of people of this character: for a regard to religion admits of a variety of degrees; and I have long thought, that the irreligion of which we complain on too juſt grounds, flows as much, if not more, from an ill-informed judgment, than from malignity of heart; and would fain hope, that the body of our people do retain, or are ſuſceptible of a regard for religion, ſufficient at leaſt for the good order of ſociety in general, and for the preſervation of our happy conſtitution. Many political and moral writers have laboured of late to do without it, or to maintain the order of ſociety, and promote the happineſs of mankind with a very ſmall tincture of religion. But from the opinion I have of the good ſenſe of the nation, I am perſuaded they will ſee, that this is a vain project of idle men, fond of novelty, and ambitious of appearing wiſer than their neighbours. You have heard ſuperficial people ſay, that a gibbet and a dungeon do more for preſerving the peace of ſociety than the fear of God; but every one knows, that legal penalties, applied with the utmoſt care, have not

not yet ſuperſeded the uſe and neceſſity of the more awful and weighty ſanctions of religion. I am ſorry to own, that many of whom better things might be expected, give too much countenance to this error, by openly profeſſing a greater zeal for the laws of the land, than for the laws of God; but you cannot conceive the ſtrong hold which even vulgar prejudices often have on the minds of men of liberal education, even on men of ſenſe and virtue. They are fully appriſed of the ill conſequences of the manner of employing the civil power in behalf of religion in ſome foreign ſtates, and have not forgot the miſchief done at home by a like miſapplication of the ſame power, and think themſelves wiſe in avoiding that extreme, without being ſenſible of the pernicious conſequences of the other; of which therefore it is the buſineſs of the clergy to advertiſe them. And let me add, that if the clergy will not take the trouble of making a ſeparation between that religion which I may call their own, (for if they have not wholly invented, they have at leaſt diſcovered it, and they only could diſcover it), and thoſe doctrines and rules of life which have undoubted marks of divine authority, they have no reaſon to complain of the laity for confounding the one with the other, as they frequently do: for lay gentlemen, however learned in other reſpects, are as little qualified to detect a falſe hypotheſis in religion, as a body of lawyers would be to correct the practice of phyſic, or a body

body of phyſicians to purge the law of its ſuperfluities.

I lay as little ſtreſs upon the talk of honour, juſtice, benevolence, and public ſpirit, in the preſent age, as ought to be laid on the talk of religion and the glory of God which paſſed current in the preceding age; but charitably judge, that in both there was, and there is ſome reality at bottom, though not enough to juſtify the high profeſſion: and with reſpect to our own times, I am perſuaded that there are few men of character who will not be moved at the heart with a fair repreſentation of the miſchief to ſociety, naturally ariſing from an inſenſibility to the obligations and ſanctions of religion. It is frightful to think of the wickedneſs that may be practiſed by a cunning bad man without any danger from the law. It is diſmal to hear of the villany actually perpetrated in ſpite of all the zeal and vigilance of the magiſtrate. Any one who gives attention to the common complaints of iniquity practiſed with impunity, muſt be convinced of the weakneſs and inſufficiency of human laws and legal penalties. Fraud, injuſtice, and even violence, appear ſo often, and in ſo many forms, and are felt ſo ſenſibly by whole families as well as individuals, and ſo little remedy had or expected from civil judges, that even the vulgar are led to think of a higher tribunal: which thing, if attended to, might give a uſeful hint to their ſuperiors: for they will

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not deny, that a juſt ſenſe of religion deeply imprinted on the mind, would prove a reſtraint when nothing elſe could.

Mankind may be divided into three claſſes: thoſe who have little ſenſe of honour or honeſty; thoſe who have a ſtrong ſenſe of honour, with a weak ſenſe of right; and thoſe who have a juſt ſenſe of both: to each of which claſſes, and to all three, the influence of religion will be found of indiſpenſable neceſſity.

It may be expected that our virtuoſi will admit this with reſpect to the firſt claſs, and leave them to be governed by religion, as they have no inbred principles to be a ſpring of wiſe and virtuous conduct. The number, it is hoped, is not exceeding great; but they are not therefore to be overlooked. They may poſſibly be equal in number to the thoroughly good, and may at ſome times, and in ſome conjunctures, become truly terrible. Beſides, though there are not many brought up in this condition, yet they receive a conſiderable acceſſion of ſtrength from thoſe who extinguiſh all their good principles by a courſe of debauchery; for there are not wanting examples of perſons, otherwiſe of good diſpoſitions, who by ſuch courſes have at length brought themſelves to a total inſenſibility of all that is virtuous or praiſe-worthy. To which let me add, that from this claſs, however inconſiderable for its number, may ariſe ſome one who from ſtep to ſtep ſhall climb up to the higheſt place,

place, perhaps get the helm into his hand, and, under the diſguiſe of ſpecious appearances, which theſe men can eaſily put on, ſhall practiſe, without fear or remorſe, the greateſt of all villanies, and ſacrifice the intereſt of his country, together with the laws of religion and morality, to the gratification of his deteſtable ambition. Now, will any man diſpute that the intereſts of ſociety require, that perſons of this character, or who too nearly approach to it, ſhould have the doctrine of a future retribution inculcated upon them, and be brought, as much as poſſible, under a deep ſenſe of their being accountable to God? for this is a reſtraint that neither cunning, nor force, nor wealth, nor rank, nor power, nor the countenance of friends, and their deceitful flattery, can altogether deſtroy.

Before I ſpeak of the ſecond claſs, let me obſerve, that the word *honour* is ambiguous. The ancients were careful to diſtinguiſh the true from the falſe, and the honour of the wiſe from that of the vulgar; underſtanding by the firſt a due regard to every thing that ſuits our rank as rational beings, as citizens of the world, and ſubjects of the univerſal ſovereign; and by the other, an attachment to ſuch things as were in common repute, and were therefore ardently ſought for by thoſe who regulated their judgment by no higher ſtandard. Taking honour in the firſt and true ſenſe, you immediately exclude all debauchees and drunkards, and all who gratify

their

their lower appetites in a manner of which they are, or ought to be, aſhamed; all who give and take bribes, who inſinuate themſelves into offices and places of preferment, by fawning, lying, and mean compliances; and, in a word, all who ſpend the beſt part of their time in eating, drinking, ſleeping, gaming, and ſuch like employments as do not diſtinguiſh them from the meaneſt of the rabble. I do not ſay that our writers upon morality have been careful to exclude all the above-mentioned characters; but in the judgment of every man of ſenſe in modern as well as ancient times, they ſtand excluded from all pretenſions to true honour, and muſt take up with what the ancients call *the honour of the vulgar*, while, in many parts of their conduct, they act with a view to obtain the public favour. But may not the judgment of the public, you will ſay, fall in with what is truly honourable? No doubt it may, and ſometimes doth; but often is in direct contradiction to it; in conſequence of which our men of honour do in ſome inſtances act worthily, and in others moſt unworthily. Shall I mention the neceſſity they are ſometimes laid under of cutting one another's throats, in defiance of the laws of God and man, in contradiction to the ſentiments of humanity, of juſtice, of prudence, and all the tender regards they owe to their families,—from a barbarous notion of honour, unknown to the wiſeſt and braveſt nations, and introduced by the ſuperſtition of the moſt igno-

rant ages? Shall I mention the inhuman perfidy practiſed againſt the moſt defenceleſs ſex, to their utter undoing, and ſometimes gloried in by *men of honour?* Does not every one know, that though people of this character muſt keep at a diſtance from thoſe vices which immediately affect the intereſts of ſociety, and in which therefore they have the public voice againſt them; yet by freely abandoning themſelves to others equally diſhonourable to human nature, deſtructive of the peace of families, hurtful to themſelves and all their moſt valuable intereſts, and often to their poſterity, they are as much as any ſet of people the bane of ſociety? The falſe principles by which this claſs of men are governed, are the more to be regretted, that under better direction many of them, in all probability, would have acted a part more happy for themſelves, and more beneficial to others.

I come now to that claſs of men who are under peculiar obligations to Providence for that temper and thoſe qualities of mind whereby they are diſtinguiſhed, and who are not the leſs bound on that account to pay a ſtrict regard to the rules of religion. As we are an order of beings ſuperior to the brute creation, deſigned for higher purpoſes, and endued with higher powers, we are not, like them, put under the direction of inſtinctive inclinations, which without our care can guide us to our chief end; but are neceſſarily obliged to exert our ſuperior

powers

powers in the ſervice of God here, in order to our being happy with him hereafter: and whoever, through ſloth or ſelf-ſufficiency, refuſes to conform to this law of his nature, muſt ſuffer the conſequences, to his own and other people's great detriment. In the beſt conſtituted body for beauty, health, and ſtrength, there is ſome inward diſorder or ſecret defect, which, if overlooked, and ſuffered to take its courſe, proves the ſource of diſeaſes and death; and, in like manner, in the beſt tempered minds there is ſome flaw or foible not perceived by the perſons themſelves, or thoſe about them, or which they and their friends are willing to overlook, or treat with indulgence, which, however, by ſuch treatment becomes the ſource of vice and miſery to themſelves, and to thoſe with whom they are connected. Some are naturally humane, gentle, kind, and open-hearted; but credulous and flexible; and have withal a quick and delicate ſenſe of pleaſure and pomp, correſponding to the delicate ſenſe they have of juſtice and honour, who, through mere inattention to the great lines of duty, become the prey of ill-deſigning people, are eaſily abuſed by falſe maxims, and at length become unable to reſiſt the ſolicitation of bad companions, or the importunity of their meaner affections. Others are temperate, juſt, and reſolute; but haughty, headſtrong, violent, dogmatic in their judgment, and precipitant in their conduct; which qualities, notwithſtanding all their

virtues, and all the veneration attending them, are often productive of great calamities to themſelves, and to the community of which they are members. Thoſe amiable and eſtimable qualities wherewith God has endued ſeveral of the ſpecies, have their uſe, and ought to have their value in life; but they will not produce that uniformly wiſe and juſt behaviour which is neceſſary for the intereſt of ſociety in this ſtate; much leſs will they qualify a man for a more perfect ſociety in the life to come. They will enable a man to act wiſely and worthily in caſes which fall in with his temper and circumſtances; but, in other caſes, will leave him expoſed to every temptation. Some other principle then of a higher kind, and of more ſteady and extenſive influence, than natural temper, muſt be cultivated; and that principle is *religion*. Religion makes the unerring model of all perfection the object of habitual attention: religion prompts us to guard againſt whatever is wrong, and is hateful to God, and to do what is good and acceptable in his ſight: and, what deſerves particular notice, religion derives from God that direction, aid, and ſupport, which alone can conduct a man with ſafety through all the dangers of life, to the perfection of virtue and happineſs, for which he is deſigned. Religion therefore ought to be cheriſhed and cultivated by every individual, by every ſociety of men, and by all the friends of our happy conſtitution.

I have cenſured with freedom, and perhaps you will think with acrimony, thoſe who have laboured to turn the attention of mankind from religion to their idle conceits; but you ſee, not without ground: and if Plato thought that Homer ſuffered in Tartarus for giving falſe repreſentations of Deity, what muſt one think of thoſe who, under ſpecious pretences of promoting the intereſts of ſociety, have weakened the allegiance of mankind to the Almighty?

I do not know if our rulers and legiſlators conſider this ſubject in the light in which I have ſtated it; but they are, I think, inexcuſable if they do not; for theſe obſervations are level to every capacity, and ought to be familiar to men of liberal education: and I hold it for a good degree of preſumption and arrogance in any man to claim a ſhare in the government of a free people, who does not know as much of human nature as ſhows him the uſe and neceſſity of religion for the order and happineſs of ſociety, and the indiſpenſable neceſſity of a ſpirit of true religion to the preſervation of the Britiſh conſtitution.

LETTER X.

I Find, that the longer I live, I am more diſpoſed to call in queſtion received opinions; becauſe many of them, on trial, appear to be no other than vulgar prejudices; and among the reſt I doubt the

the truth of the common opinion, that people of high rank have no regard to religion, becauſe I violently ſuſpect that their inferiors do them wrong. Have you not obſerved a malignant joy in ſome people's looks on reciting the follies and vices of the great? and do not you perceive, that the lower gentry who addict themſelves to faſhionable vices, are induſtrious to perſuade all about them, that thoſe of high rank think it below them to mind religion, or to be governed by the rules obſerved by the vulgar? Beſides, you know that the vices and impiety of a great man make a great noiſe, and ſpread far, ſet many tongues a-going, when vices equally atrocious in people of low rank are little heard of, or ſoon forgot; and for this and other reaſons I incline to think, that great people are not ſo bad as their inferiors are willing to believe.

It is true, that men of worth will be found in greater numbers where one would wiſh to find them, in the middle ranks, who make the body of a people, and the ſtrength of the nation: but ſurely we are not to look on thoſe in the oppoſite extremes as reprobates; for there are perſons of diſtinguiſhed worth both in high and low life. And further, it will be allowed, that perſons in high ſtations, who are eminent for piety and virtue, make a glorious figure, and prove an unſpeakable bleſſing to the community. It ought alſo to be admitted, that, when you ſet aſide thoſe who diſgrace their ſtation, people of rank

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have an extent of knowledge and a delicacy of ſentiment, together with an elevation of ſpirit, which is not only ornamental, but highly uſeful to ſociety, and which gives ground to hope that they may be made ſenſible of the deformity and deſtructive effects of irreligion.

Do you think it impoſſible, that great people ſhould be convinced of the groſs abſurdity of growing more remiſs and careleſs in the worſhip of God, in proportion as they improve in every expreſſion of regard to one another? The thing is ſo contrary to all reaſon, and to all the ſentiments of a liberal mind, and is withal ſo high an indignity to God, that, one way or other, it muſt come to a ſpeedy iſſue. And I would fain hope, from certain favourable circumſtances, and from the diſtinguiſhed character of a great perſonage, that we ſhall ere long ſee ſomething done to correct ſo groſs an abuſe; and in the mean time muſt conſider it as ſtrictly incumbent on the preachers of the goſpel, to point out, and, as far as in them lies, to bear down, a corruption of manners, ſo pernicious in itſelf, and ſo inconſiſtent with good ſenſe and ingenuity.

I muſt confeſs indeed, that great people are often ſtrangely ignorant of what they owe to the public. If a ſoldier of rank is attentive to thoſe under his command in a time of peace, and fights bravely at their head in a time of danger, he thinks he has acquitted himſelf fully to the public, without regard to the purity of his morals; if a judge is aſſiduous and impartial in deciding law-ſuits,

law-ſuits, he thinks the public indebted to him, though he may not preſerve that ſerious concern for the intereſts of religion and virtue which ſuits his character; and if a man of fortune maintains the dignity of his rank, and helps to keep the peace of his country, he conſiders himſelf as of conſequence to the public, which indeed he is, whilſt it hardly enters perhaps into his mind, to ſet his inferiors an example of piety, ſobriety, and charity. There is here a lowneſs and narrowneſs of thought, unknown to virtuous Heathens, that needs much to be corrected. If virtue, as is generally allowed, be the greateſt good, and vice the greateſt evil, that can affect the human kind, he who by his example and influence promotes the love of religion and righteouſneſs, is undoubtedly a greater friend to mankind, and a greater benefactor to the community of which he is a member, than he who procures them ſignal advantages of any other nature; as, on the other hand, the perſon who by his influence and example alienates mens hearts from religion and righteouſneſs, doth a miſchief to individuals and to the community, which cannot be atoned for by the greateſt ſervices he can otherwiſe perform; becauſe the bleſſings he procures are temporary and tranſient, whereas the poiſon with which he has corrupted their minds, ſpreads from one to another, and goes often down from father to ſon;—and, if there is a life after this, reaches to eternity. Theſe truths

ſet up in their full light to vicious men of power and influence, and by them ſeriouſly conſidered, would make their hearts to tremble, or at leaſt could not fail to have ſome conſiderable effect upon them.

An opinion begins to ſpread among people of rank and men of buſineſs, that true religion has little influence on the affairs of men, and therefore is not much to be minded: We do not perceive, ſay they, that religious perſons are better citizens than others, and therefore we do not ſee why we ſhould give ourſelves any concern about it. Here again is a groſs miſtake, derived from a ſuperficial knowledge of the ſprings of action in the human ſoul; for religion certainly hath great influence on the conduct of mankind, though not all that it ought or might be expected to have. As the tyrant is often checked by humanity, and the knave imbarraſſed by his regard to truth and juſtice; ſo a regard to religion, and to its dictates, often hath a conſiderable influence even on the irreligious. The world is bad enough; but it would be infinitely worſe than it is, if it were not for the partial influence of theſe good principles; for which reaſon they ought to be cheriſhed with great tenderneſs by all who wiſh well to the intereſts of ſociety and of mankind. Any one who takes into conſideration the infidelity of ſervants, from the higheſt to the loweſt families, the numberleſs abuſes eſtabliſhed in all offices, from the prime miniſter to the meaneſt exciſeman, and

the little ſafety you have in truſting to a man's honeſty who can deceive or over-reach you with impunity, will ſee, that a regard to juſtice hath, alas! too little influence on the manners of men. Will he therefore conclude, that we may treat that principle with contempt or neglect, or bear with thoſe who trample on its authority? It is but too true, that there is little real religion and downright honeſty in the world; ſo little indeed of either, that we ought to be extremely tender of both; for without a certain degree of both, it is impoſſible to conceive how ſociety can ſubſiſt: and the firſt appears ſo neceſſary to keep alive and give ſtrength to the other, that the neglect of religion, which grows every day more and more univerſal, is a frightful ſymptom, not enough attended to even by thoſe who have the care of our conſtitution; and of which therefore they ought to be advertiſed by others, whoſe office obliges them to give timely notice of imminent danger.

LETTER XI.

YOU remember the noble decree of the Roman ſenate, appointing a reward to the general who did not deſpair of the commonwealth in the worſt circumſtances. Judge, then, if you or I ought to be diſcouraged with the ill ſucceſs of religion. Ideal perfection is not to be reached

ed in religion, or in any thing elſe. The religious, it is true, do not act up to the rules of their profeſſion; neither do ſtateſmen, magiſtrates, ſoldiers, nor even mechanics. Perhaps the religious come farther ſhort of their ſtandard than others; nor are you much to wonder, when you conſider how high the ſtandard is. I know that the world is ready to impute their failures to hypocriſy; but the judgment is neither charitable nor juſt. There are pretenders to true piety, as to every laudable accompliſhment; but I ſhould be glad to know, whether, in the preſent age, the mere pretenders to religion, or to honour and honeſty, are moſt numerous. Be that however as it will, I rely on our Saviour's account of the ſtate of religion: "The kingdom "of Heaven ſhall be likened to ten virgins, who "took their lamps, and went out to meet the "bridegroom; and five of them were wiſe, and "five were fooliſh. They that were fooliſh, took "their lamps, and took no oil with them; but "the wiſe took oil in their veſſels with their "lamps. And while the bridegroom tarried, "they all ſlumbered and ſlept." This is the truth of the whole matter: the one half of the religious do not act with judgment; and they who act moſt prudently, do not exert themſelves as they ought.

We ſhould therefore be cautious of imputing falſe views to thoſe who appear ſerious about religion; for all ſuch intend the ſame thing, though

ſome take wrong meaſures, and others are not ſo vigilant and active as might be expected. Our buſineſs is to ſet thoſe right who have taken falſe meaſures, and to rouſe up others who are ſeized with a ſpirit of ſlumber. And I ſee no reaſon to deſpair of ſucceſs with either. Where lies the difficulty of perſuading thoſe who have devoted themſelves to the ſervice of the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, and take ſuch pains already to cultivate pious ſentiments and affections towards him; I ſay, where lies the difficulty of prevailing on people of this diſpoſition, to beſtow a little more care in governing their temper, and regulating their actions in common life, by the rules which Chriſt hath preſcribed, and exemplified in his own conduct upon earth? And as to thoſe who by practice and habit have already acquired the pious, the benevolent, the meek, the humble, and peaceable diſpoſition, and who of courſe have taſted the joy of theſe virtues, the difficulty appears ſtill leſs of perſuading them to be yet more pious, more benevolent, more gentle and humane. An objection will be immediately offered even by the religious themſelves, from the temptations of the world, the craft of the devil, and the ſubtlety and violence of their paſſions; but it ought not to be ſuſtained, becauſe the grace of the goſpel has provided ſufficiently againſt all theſe dangers. The dangers are real, and ought to rouſe Chriſtians to great care and induſtry; but this ſingle truth, "That the Lord

"Jeſus

"Jeſus Chriſt is exalted to the right hand of "God," is ſufficient to prevent his followers from being diſcouraged with difficulties or dangers of what kind ſoever. Nor ought they only to expect a divine aid and ſupport, when they exert themſelves to the utmoſt, but alſo to believe, that their patron and protector will favour their good beginnings, and forward their imperfect and feeble attempts, and "that God will be merciful "to their unrighteouſneſs, and remember their "ſins and iniquities no more." It is hard dealing with profligates, and ſtill harder to deal with hypocrites; but with ſuch encouragements as theſe now mentioned, there ſeems to be no difficulty in perſuading the well-intentioned and the well-diſpoſed to do honour to their profeſſion.

The numbers of thoſe who profeſs religion, and are more or leſs attached to its intereſts, even in this irreligious age, are no way inconſiderable; and if they did unite and co-operate in promoting its concerns, they would, under the patronage of the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, prove an overmatch for all the enemies of his kingdom. Or if, through the earneſtneſs and perſuaſive addreſs of the miniſters of the goſpel, they could be prevailed on to exert themſelves in their ſeveral ſtations, the happy effects to the bulk of mankind would be great. If they who cannot with peace of mind omit any of the ſtated offices of devotion, could as little indulge themſelves in the neglect of what they owe as huſband or wives,

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maſters or ſervants, parents or children, friends or fellow-citizens, to thoſe with whom they are particularly connected;—if they who, on the return of every Chriſtian ſabbath, with ſo much unfeigned zeal attend for ſome hours the duties of public worſhip, were no leſs conſcientious in the duties of their cloſet, in acts of juſtice and mercy, in viſiting the fatherleſs and widow in their afflictions, and in keeping themſelves unſpotted from the world;---if they who complain of the roving of their thoughts and the languor of their ſpirits in acts of devotion, felt no leſs concern for the vanity, the ſelfiſhneſs, the pride and paſſion which are in ſome meaſure felt, and may at times break out in the common commerce of life, and were no leſs careful to guard againſt the one than againſt the other, and no leſs deſirous of the divine aſſiſtance in the one than in the other:---if all, I ſay, who profeſs religion, and are ſincerely attached to its intereſts, conducted themſelves in this manner, do you think, that the conſequences would be inconſiderable?

Have I mentioned any thing that is not eſſential to religion, any thing that with the grace of the goſpel is impracticable, any thing which a miniſter of religion may not with reaſon and juſtice demand and expect of its profeſſors? It is commonly and juſtly ſaid, that a preacher ought to recommend his doctrine by his practice, and that a good practice has great force in procuring that regard to the truths of religion, which

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otherwiſe is not to be expected. But have not the preachers a right to make the ſame obſervation to their hearers? If a miniſter of a pariſh, ſuppoſe him a burning and ſhining light, can by his pure and unblemiſhed converſation make an impreſſion on the hearts of his hearers; how great do you think would the impreſſion be from a cluſter of ſhining Chriſtians, who would all in their different ſpheres conſpire to promote the ſame deſign? Do you think that the hearts of ſceptics or infidels or profligates, bad as you may ſuppoſe them to be, would be altogether inſenſible to the force of this argument in favour of the truth and excellence of religion?

It is in vain to talk to mankind of its excellence conſidered in the abſtract, and to argue, that if it were practiſed with more fidelity, it would have greater and more beneficial effects; for that does not meet with the difficulty that lies at the bottom of mens hearts: but if we would give a true and full anſwer, we muſt call upon the religious to produce thoſe proofs of the excellence and energy of religion that are unanſwerable, and which captivate the heart, as well as convince the underſtanding. Talk to huſbandmen of a new method of agriculture, however practicable, rational, uſeful, and neceſſary, againſt which they have imbibed ſtrong prejudices, and they will but barely hear you, without aſſent or regard; but give them a proper number of trials, and let them ſee others grow rich and flouriſhing by it,

and

and they will almoſt all reduce it to practice. It is juſt ſo, and no otherwiſe in religion. The kingdom of God was never intended to be carried on merely by the wiſdom and eloquence of preachers, without the help of a perſuaſion far more effectual, ariſing from the lives of the religious; and if the miniſters of religion have any title by their own behaviour to make demands upon the people, they may ſurely call upon them, upon all who profeſs religion, to give this proof of their zeal and attachment to its intereſts.

LETTER XII.

I May be miſtaken, but it is my opinion, that our affairs are come to a criſis, and that in all probability we ſhall undergo a ſad reverſe of fortune, or riſe to a pitch of glory and proſperity never known before. It is impoſſible to conceive that this mighty empire, of which we are already poſſeſſed, ſhould be managed by talents adequate only to figuring in a drawing-room, to planning a garden or a palace, or pronouncing on the beauties of a claſſical author. Nor can it be expected that they who have ſpent their youth in elegant amuſements, or in caballing for preferment, ſhould be capable of that extent, depth, and ſteadineſs of thought, which is neceſſary for preventing convulſions at home, or formidable combinations

combinations abroad. The labour of the mind is as real as that of the body, and one is as insupportable and impracticable as the other, to thoſe who have not been trained to it from their youth; of which every one may furniſh examples to himſelf from his knowledge of perſons of good underſtanding, and of good education, who with all their other uſeful accompliſhments labour under this incapacity.

Every one who loves his country, muſt rejoice in the increaſe of its commerce, and in the ſpreading of that ſpirit of induſtry which prevails univerſally: but while a people are uſefully and buſily employed on all hands, there ſeems to be occaſion for a certain number to think and judge, and form plans for the whole. From the firſt formation of civil ſociety, judgment, capacity, and talents for government, have been found indiſpenſable to free ſtates in proportion to their freedom and greatneſs; and in no ſtate can theſe accompliſhments be leſs diſpenſed with than in ours: ſo that if men of buſineſs will go on to mind their own particular concerns, and men of fortune mind nothing but elegant pleaſures, and thoſe at the helm confine their views to ſtill the preſent clamour, provide for the exigencies of the preſent year, or ſettle the preſent treaty or foreign tranſaction, it is eaſy to foretell our doom. We may for ſome time make a glorious figure in fair weather, and on a ſmooth ſurface; but when a ſtorm ariſes, ſhall be ſoon at our wits

end; as we ſeemed to be a few years ago: and tho' we may weather the ſtorm for a while, and ride it out triumphantly when we cope with a people worſe governed or more diſſolute than ourſelves, we cannot be ſuppoſed to do ſo long.

On the other hand, if the profound ſciences come again into repute, and become the ſtudy of people of rank, there is reaſon to expect, from the practical turn which prevails, that they will put on a new form, and every branch of learning be rendered more ſubſervient to the ends of government, and to all the valuable purpoſes of life, than they have yet been; and thoſe ſciences in particular which have the greateſt and moſt extenſive influence on the happineſs of mankind, will be had in higheſt eſteem: and if it ſhould pleaſe God to put this nation under the direction of thoſe who aim at ſomething higher than temporary grandeur, and look beyond appearances, to the remote as well as immediate ſprings of action, the utmoſt attention will be given to the ſentiments and manners of the people, and all due encouragement to the propagating and inculcating thoſe truths which may have the moſt beneficial and moſt laſting influence upon them. As little regard will be then paid to idle queſtions and frivolous debates, we may expect that the doctrines of natural and revealed religion will appear in a new light, and with a force not hitherto experienced. A few ſuch geniuſes (and ſuch geniuſes ſurely there are, however they may be

be employed) as did honour to former reigns, would, under proper countenance, make an impreſſion on the hearts and conſciences of men, that would facilitate the labours of the magiſtrate and of the legiſlature, prevent thoſe ugly appearances which have diſturbed us of late, give a new impulſe, with a true direction to our induſtry in every laudable art, and add an internal ſtrength and ſoundneſs of health to the whole body-politic, that would rejoice the heart of every true Briton. And with regard to our numerous ſects, the tenets on which moſt of them are founded, are in themſelves ſo frivolous and futile, that on ſuppoſition of the above-mentioned improvements, men of ſenſe muſt give them up, if not from conſcience, at leaſt from a regard to character. Some people will ſay with a ſneer, that I propheſy the approach of the Millennium; and in truth it is difficult to make thoſe of low minds, and narrow views, conceive the height of proſperity, glory, and real happineſs, to which a people diſtinguiſhed by good ſenſe and inbred generoſity of heart, attended with undaunted courage and perſevering induſtry, might be carried by the labours of but a few endued with talents for government, and inſpired with the love of their country. Whether this or the reverſe is to be the lot of this nation, is hid from the moſt penetrating politician, as much as from you and me; but can eaſily be brought about by him "who rules in the kingdoms of men, and turns

" the hearts of princes and nobles as he does the " rivers of water."

You certainly wonder at my lanching out ſo boldly on a ſubject which I muſt be ſuppoſed to have ſtudied ſo little. But Dr Swift, who was no ſtranger to theſe matters, has ſatisfied me, that though miniſters of ſtate may affect to make a myſtery of their buſineſs, and how many and great qualifications ſoever may be neceſſary to the right diſcharge of their ſeveral offices; yet there are certain truths of general concern that are obvious to all, and on which every man of ſenſe may, with an ordinary degree of attention, pronounce as juſtly as the deepeſt politician. I remember the time when this iſland rung with clamours of patriotiſm, and loud complaints of public meaſures; but as thoſe zealous reformers ſhewed no concern about the intereſts of religion and morality, we were not ſurpriſed that things ended ſhamefully, as they did. Since that time our buſtling people have been ſhy of giving themſelves high airs of patriotiſm, except occaſionally, and with a view to the mere vulgar: neither do people of underſtanding intereſt themſelves in their ſquabbles about power: nor do thoſe at or about the helm ſeem to give any particular attention to the ſucceſs of religion, or the manners of the people, though they were early called upon by our great and good ſovereign. But let us not deſpair. It is yet to be hoped, that in the body of the people there is a ſpirit

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that will not give way to the pride and vices of the great, or the licentiouſneſs and inſolence of the rabble; and that will oblige our haughty grandees and powerful demagogues to conform to the noble principles of wiſe government, and the ſalutary meaſures of the beſt of ſovereigns: and if, reſuming our national character of good ſenſe, and diſmiſſing the idle cavils of ſceptics, we ſhall indeed return to the worſhip and obedience of God, we may hope that a kind providence will from time to time raiſe up ſtateſmen and lawgivers qualified to maintain the harmony, union, and juſt ſubordination of power, which makes the beauty, ſtrength, and ſtability, of the Britiſh conſtitution.

LETTER XIII.

DID you know the bottom of my mind, you would find little occaſion, my dear friend, for cautioning me againſt too ſanguine hopes of ſucceſs: for when I reflect on the plain directions, the many earneſt and tender expoſtulations, the encouraging promiſes, and, at the ſame time, the dreadful denunciations of vengeance, delivered with ſo little effect by the prophets of God to the people of Iſrael, I am bound to conclude, that though all the virtuous clergy of Britain ſhould exert themſelves to the utmoſt, they would not be able altogether to ſtop the career of

of a people elated with proſperity, and devoted to buſineſs and pleaſure. Yet I would not ſuſtain this as an excuſe for a clergyman's neglecting to diſcharge his duty to his country. The miniſters of religion ought, no doubt, to keep at a diſtance from ſtate-intrigues; they ought alſo to be ſhy in pronouncing publicly on this and the other meaſure of government: but when our all is in danger from diſſipation of thought, and diſſoluteneſs of manners; and when they foreſee that the beſt conſtitution in the world muſt go to wreck, through the neglect or diſregard of religion, I hold it to be the ſtrict duty of every worthy miniſter of religion to give warning, whilſt he leaves the event to the Almighty; and cannot help thinking, that, under God, this is the moſt promiſing way of bringing a people, who are allowed their ſhare of probity and good ſenſe, to a juſt way of thinking.

I do not love to hear certain well-diſpoſed perſons talk ſo eaſily and familiarly as they do, of ſome terrible judgments to bring us to our ſenſes; for if God calls this "his ſtrange work," it becomes us to think of every other mean of reformation before we have recourſe to it. Beſides, if you conſult the hiſtory of the Old Teſtament, you will not be poſitive about the good effects even of this powerful mean. A people who retain a principle of piety, in any tolerable degree of ſtrength, may be corrected and amended by chaſtiſements; but they who are corrupted in

principles

principles and practice, ſeem to be more ripe for utter exciſion, than reformation, by the righteous judgments of God. "Why ſhould ye be ſtricken "any more? ye will revolt more and more: the "whole head is ſick, and the whole heart is faint." Panic and conſternation, dejection of ſpirit and deſperation, are the effects to be expected, on ſome terrible calamity, from a people ſo ignorant, ſo dubious, ſo ill-informed of what they owe to God, and ſo inattentive to ſacred obligations, as the bulk of our people appear to be.

Many divines and moraliſts ſeem to give up the preſent age, and to found all their hopes of reformation on the riſing generation. But they do not conſider the impoſſibility of raiſing the youth to any conſiderable height of moral worth, without a previous change to the better in the temper and manners of thoſe who have the forming of them. Pious parents will, like good Abraham, form their children and their houſehold as nearly as they can to their own temper and manners; but you are not to expect, that parents or tutors will lay principles in the minds of their children or pupils, that would breed a diſguſt or contempt of their own way of living. Such parents as keep clear of groſs vices, and ſhow an outward regard to religion, will probably take care to give a regular and decent education to their children; and all parents of rank and ſtation will be anxious to guard their children againſt the vices of the vulgar: but we ought not to

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flatter ourſelves with the hope of effects, however deſireable in themſelves, for which we know no cauſes that in the nature of things are adequate or proportional.

Some people talk much of the happy fruits that would be derived from the good example of the great. And indeed if this order of men would ſo far intereſt themſelves in the ſafety of their country, as to maintain a decent behaviour, the conſequence would be conſiderable: but we ought to remember, that rank and diſtinction are not conferred in a monarchy as in a republic; and though our conſtitution may be called a republic under the diſguiſe of monarchy, yet we have, and muſt have numbers of people great by their birth, without regard to moral character, or even to capacity. If the public peace be maintained, and the government tolerably well executed, we muſt not complain. Men may be good generals, good admirals, tolerably good magiſtrates, and miniſters of ſtate, who cannot be bright patterns of thoſe virtues which in truth they do not poſſeſs, or poſſeſs but in a low degree. We have, no doubt, a right to expect wholeſome laws from thoſe we have intruſted with our ſafety; but who are to put laws againſt profaneneſs in execution? If we conſider the difficulties that Peter the Great ſtruggled with, in bringing about a reformation even in trifles, by the moſt unlimited authority, we can hardly expect

pect a cure of our corruption from the whole force of the legiſlature.

There is a claſs of men too long overlooked, on whom the friends of religion and of our happy conſtitution ought to have their chief dependence, under God. They are diſtinguiſhed more by their inward temper than by their external circumſtances. Their character does not intitle them to any marks of honour from the powers on earth; but the Almighty has ſtamped a dignity on their ſouls that procures them an attention and influence, which the pomp of this life cannot beſtow. A kind providence hath alſo diſperſed them through all conditions of life: and if the miniſters of religion are unacquainted with them, it is their own fault; for they are eaſily known, by a ſolidity of judgment, and probity of heart, and elevation of ſentiment, which raiſes them above the common level; and if they can be prevailed on to eſpouſe the intereſts of religion and of their country, their example and influence would do more to check the preſumptuous, to encourage and ſupport the weak but well-meaning, and to form the whole body of the people to a wiſe and juſt conduct, than all the other powers on earth.

The gaining of one ſuch proſelyte would give more joy in heaven, and be attended with more bleſſed and beneficial effects on earth, than the confutation of a hundred wrong-headed diſputants, or even than the formal profeſſion of multitudes who in the common way of judging,

paſs for good Chriſtians. What then would be the effect, if all, or the greateſt part of the perſons of this character, were truly religious? Would not this indeed make a glorious epocha in the Britiſh annals?

Shall an event ſo deſireable, and ſo conformable to the nature of things, be conſidered as chimerical? Have not changes as unexpected and more improbable been brought about by means leſs powerful than thoſe mighty truths wherewith we are intruſted? Ought not all proper means to be tried, and the event left to God? Can we doubt the gracious concurrence of his all-wiſe and all-powerful providence? We muſt not wait till God puts it into the hearts of the great to patroniſe religion, or till the generality of parents are inſpired with zeal for training up their children for the kingdom of God, or even for being uſeful members of civil ſociety. Much leſs muſt we look for ſome terrible convulſion at home, or ſome formidable combination abroad, to bring men to a juſt ſenſe of their dependence on God. But taking mankind as they are, the miniſters of religion ought to employ the means of which they are poſſeſſed, to beget and propagate a ſenſe of duty in all ranks and orders of men Some indeed are impenetrable; and the hearts of others are too full of the cares and pleaſures of life to admit a ſerious ſenſe of religion; and others are ſo weak and volatile, as not to adhere ſteadily to any plan of life. But the hearts of ſome, like good ſoil, will receive the ſeed of truth, and, by

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the divine bleſſing, bring forth fruit in proportion to the good ſenſe, ſpirit, and probity, of which they are poſſeſſed: and as they are diſperſed through all ranks, their good example may, by the ſame bleſſing, work ſecretly and imperceptibly on the minds of men, till the maſs of the people be changed, with reſpect to their ſentiments and manners. I do not affirm that this will happen; but no man can affirm that it will not. I am not ignorant of many obſtructions and almoſt inſurmountable difficulties in the way of ſo deſireable an event; but neither can any one be ignorant of a power ſufficient for removing theſe obſtructions and overcoming theſe difficulties, and ſufficient of conſequence to give encouragement to all who engage in the noble deſign.

When twelve fiſhermen ſet out on the buſineſs of converting mankind, the wiſe men and diſputers of the world would have pronounced it a ſilly project: but we have ſeen enough to ſatisfy us, "that the wiſdom of man is fooliſhneſs with "God." When Wickliff in England, and Luther in Germany, declared againſt the errors of the church of Rome, and even after that numbers had embraced the truth, no wiſe man could have foreſeen and promiſed, that ſo many ſtates in Europe would have ſhaken off the Papal yoke. The events of the laſt war, ſo much beyond, and ſo contrary to all expectation, are ſufficient, if we knew no more, to ſatisfy a man of judgment, that God governs the world. Little minds will be pronouncing deciſively on future

events from their own partial views; but true wiſdom and true greatneſs of ſoul ſhow themſelves, by purſuing noble ends by noble means, with an entire reſignation to him who has all the powers of nature in his direction, and the abſolute diſpoſal of all events.

"He that obſerveth the wind, ſhall not ſow; "and he that regardeth the clouds, ſhall not reap. "As thou knoweſt not what is the way of the "ſpirit, nor how the bones do grow in the "womb of her that is with child, even ſo thou "knoweſt not the works of God, who maketh "all. In the morning ſow thy ſeed, and in the "evening with-hold not thine hand; for thou "knoweſt not whether ſhall proſper either this or "that, or whether they both ſhall be alike good."

LETTER XIV.

ONE who has borne office ſo long in the church, and enjoyed ſo extenſive and intimate acquaintance with its miniſters in different parts, would give a bad ſpecimen of his own heart, by inſinuating a ſuſpicion of the goodneſs of theirs: but I was naturally led to urge the culture of piety, from obſerving a fact which I dare ſay has not eſcaped your attention, namely, that in almoſt every corner of the country you will find miniſters of diſtinguiſhed ſenſe, and ſome of true learning, but rarely thoſe of diſtinguiſhed piety, and ſcarce any acknowledged by all to be eminently

eminently pious; which was not the caſe in former times, and could hardly happen in ſo large a body of men devoted to the practice of piety, if all the application was given, which ought, and in reaſon might be expected in cultivating ſo excellent and indiſpenſable a quality.

You will ſay, that genuine piety is modeſt, reſerved, and not at all of a glaring appearance. True: ſo is true learning and good ſenſe; but where-ever theſe qualities are found in any eminent degree, they are ſoon taken notice of: ſo that there muſt be ſome error here that needs to be corrected. It is remarkable, that many divines of manly ſenſe and unqueſtionable piety are ſometimes reſtrained from mentioning, or at leaſt from inſiſting upon the operation of the Spirit of God, and from doing juſtice to other goſpel-truths, by a panic fear of enthuſiaſm; and very poſſibly a panic of the ſame kind may hinder ſome miniſters of this church, who are ſincerely pious, from making the proficiency which otherwiſe they would in that eſſential quality. And further, from what has happened at home and abroad, there appears to be ſome difficulty in raiſing the devout temper to its due height, without the hazard of carrying it higher than ſuits with human frailty, and conſiſts with propriety of behaviour in the commerce of life. Beſides, if the church were adorned with examples of eminent piety, it is to be feared that ſome weak, and perhaps other falſe-hearted brethren, dazzled with the ſplendor of their character, would deliver themſelves up to raving

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and tranſport, which always hath proved, and ever will prove, pernicious to the intereſts of religion. All this I readily allow; but will not ſuſtain as ſufficient to excuſe miniſters in the neglect of a neceſſary duty; becauſe if they will proceed with judgment and honeſty, they may undoubtedly maintain an elevation of heart amidſt the enjoyments and buſineſs of life, which, inſtead of being prejudicial, will give beauty and ſtrength to every uſeful and ornamental quality; and it is ſtrictly incumbent on miniſters of the goſpel to give examples in their lives, as well as deſcriptions in their ſermons, of this happy diſpoſition: nor ought they to be diverted from cultivating the ſpirit of their profeſſion, by idle fears of what with proper care may be eaſily avoided. Men do not ſlacken their application to ſcience from the fear of falling into pedantry. They do not lay aſide the ſtudy of eloquence and poetry from the known danger of running into the bombaſt: nor would it be wiſe to lay reſtraints on trade from the fear of its common attendant, luxury. No; let us check folly and extravagance where-ever they appear; but endeavour to carry every laudable, uſeful, and neceſſary accompliſhment to its utmoſt perfection. And as there never was leſs danger from enthuſiaſm than at preſent, ſo the church of Scotland was never in better condition for introducing a rational and manly piety in all its ſtrength and dignity, if miniſters of experience and ability would beſtow a kind care in forming the

the minds of their younger brethren, of thoſe eſpecially who are of ingenuous temper and ſound underſtanding.

I hope that my brethren, thoſe in particular whom I would leaſt willingly offend, will not take amiſs my cautioning them againſt cultivating their underſtandings to the neglect of their hearts, becauſe they know that a caution of this kind is in a great meaſure neceſſary. So much knowledge, extent and depth of thought, and accuracy, and maturity of judgment, are neceſſary for thoſe who take upon them to conduct mankind through all the dangers and errors of life, as ſeems to juſtify the utmoſt application we can give to reading and thinking. Beſides, the charms of ſcience are ſtrong, and the thirſt of knowledge is ſo boundleſs, that, if not checked, it will leave little room, and leſs inclination, for other employments; and yet, as in all other arts and ſciences, ſo eſpecially in religion and virtue, that knowledge is moſt valuable which flows from experience; and we might, by a ſtrict attention to our own temper and manners, and by ſtudying all the rules of turning the bias of our hearts from the wrong ſide to the right, learn a ſcience of more benefit to ourſelves, and to thoſe under our charge, than all that we can gather from our own or other peoples reaſonings and ſpeculations. The one ſtudy, it muſt be confeſſed, is not ſo inviting as the other; but, like many other objects of a ſevere and forbidding aſpect, it affords the trueſt and moſt permanent ſatisfaction, and will give immenſe

immenſe joy in the end, when other things are found to be "vanity and vexation of ſpirit." But without ſubjecting ourſelves to unneceſſary ſeverities, or giving up accompliſhments that are ornamental, if not alſo neceſſary in their own place, one may venture to affirm, that miniſters of the goſpel would do beſt to copy the example of their great maſter, who divided his time between acts of ſolemn devotion to God, and friendly and familiar intercourſe with men, rather than in a fruitleſs purſuit of that ſatisfaction which, in many points, is beſt reſerved for a ſtate of higher perfection. I have before me the dying thoughts of a great ſaint, who acknowledged, that from his youth he began with things of greateſt weight, and referred moſt of his other ſtudies to that end, and to his own and other people's profit; and yet, ſeduced a little, as would ſeem, by that penetrating acuteneſs which he poſſeſſed in ſo high a degree, he ſaw occaſion to pray God to forgive his ſpending thoſe hours in reading things leſs profitable, for the pleaſing of a mind that would needs know all, which ſhould have been ſpent for the increaſe of holineſs in himſelf and others. And if one ſo entirely devoted to God, and ſo inceſſantly occupied in promoting the intereſts of his kingdom, ſaw occaſion for this prayer and theſe reflections, can I be blamed for cautioning my brethren againſt cultivating their underſtandings to the neglect of their hearts?

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